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WILLING TO DIE.

VOL. II.

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WILLING TO DIE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"UNCLE SILAS,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WILLING TO DIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR'S NEWS.

"OH! how do you do, Doctor Droqville?" said mamma, with a very real welcome in looks and accent.

"How d'ye do, Droqville?" said my father, a little dryly, I fancied.

"Have you had your breakfast?" asked mamma.

"Two hours ago."

"We are very late here," said papa.

"I should prefer thinking I am very early, in my primitive quarters," answered Mr. Droqville.

"I had not an idea we should have found you in town, just now."

"In season or out of season, a physician should always be at his post. I'm beginning to learn rather late there's some truth in that old proverb about moss, you know, and rolling stones, and it costs even a bachelor something to keep body and soul together in this mercenary, tailoring, cutlet-eating world." At this moment he saw me, and made me a bow. "Miss Ware?" he said, a little inquiringly to mamma. "Yes, I knew perfectly it was the young lady I had seen at Malory. Some faces are not easily forgotten," he added, gallantly, with a glance at me. "I threatened to run away with her, but she was firm as fate," he smiled and went on; "and I paid a visit to our friend Carmel, you know."

"And how did you think he was?" she asked; and I listened with interest for the answer.

"He's consumptive. He's at this side of

the Styx, it is true; but his foot is in the water, and Charon's obolus is always between his finger and thumb. He'll die young. He may live five years, it is true; but he is not likely to live two. And if he happens to take cold and begins to cough, he might not last four months."

"My wife has been complaining," said papa; "I wish you could do something for her. You still believe in Doctor Droqville? I think she half believes you have taken a degree in divinity as well as in medicine; if so, a miracle, now and then, would be quite in your way."

"But I assure you, Doctor Droqville, I never said any such thing. It was you who thought," she said to my father, "that Doctor Droqville was in orders."

Droqville laughed.

"But, Doctor Droqville, I think," said mamma, "you would have made a very good priest."

"There are good priests, madame, of

various types; Madame de Genlis, for instance, commends an abbé of her acquaintance; he was a most respectable man, she says, and never ridiculed revealed religion but with moderation."

Papa laughed, but I could see that he did not like Doctor Droqville. There was something dry, and a little suspicious in his manner, so slight that you could hardly define it, but which contrasted strikingly with the decision and *insouciance* of Doctor Droqville's talk.

"But, you know, you never do that, even with moderation; and you can argue so closely when you please."

"There, madame, you do me too much honour. I am the worst logician in the world. I wrote a part of an essay on Christian chivalry, and did pretty well, till I began to reason; the essay ended, and I was swallowed up in this argument—pray listen to it. To sacrifice your life for the lady you adore is a high degree of heroism; but to

sacrifice your soul for her is the highest degree of heroism. But the highest degree of heroism is but another name for Christianity; and, therefore, to act thus can't sacrifice your soul, and if it doesn't you don't practise a heroism, and therefore no Christianity, and, therefore, you do sacrifice your soul. But if you do sacrifice your soul, it is the highest heroism—therefore Christianity; and, therefore, you don't sacrifice your soul, and so, *da capo*, it goes on for ever—and I can't extricate myself. When I mean to make a boat, I make a net; and this argument that I invented to carry me some little way on my voyage to truth, not only won't hold water, but has caught me by the foot, entangles, and drowns me. I never went on with my essay."

In this cynical trifling there was a contemptuous jocularity quite apparent to me, although mamma took it all in good faith, and said,

"It is very puzzling, but it can't be true;

and I should think it almost a duty to find out where it is wrong."

Papa laughed, and said:

"My dear, don't you see that Doctor Droqville is mystifying us?"

I was rather glad, for I did not like it. I was vexed for mamma. Doctor Droqville's talk seemed to me an insolence.

"It is quite true, I am no logician; I had better continue as I am. I make a tolerable physician; if I became a preacher, with my defective ratiocination, I should inevitably lose myself and my audience in a labyrinth. You make but a very short stay in town, I suppose?" he broke off suddenly. "It isn't tempting, so many houses sealed—a city of the dead. One does not like, madame, as your Doctor Johnson said to Mrs. Thrale, to come down to vacuity."

"Well, it is only a visit of two or three days. My daughter Ethel is coming out next Spring, and she came up to meet us

here. I wish her to have a few weeks with masters, and there are more things to be thought of than you would suppose. Do you think there is anything a country miss would do well to read up that we might have forgotten?"

"Read? read? Oh! yes, two things."

"What are they?"

"If she has a sound knowledge of the heathen mythology, and a smattering of the Bible, she'll do very well."

"But she won't talk about the Bible," laughed papa; "people who like it, read it to themselves."

"Very true," said Doctor Droqville, "you never mention it; but, quite unconsciously, you are perpetually alluding to it. Nothing strikes a stranger more, if he understands your language as I do. You had a note from Lady Lorrimer?"

"No," said mamma.

The word "note," I think, struck papa as

implying that she was nearer than letter-writing distance, and he glanced quickly at Doctor Droqville.

"And where is Lady Lorrimer now?" asked papa.

"That is what I came to tell you. She is at Mivart's. I told her you were in town, and I fancied you would have had a note from her; but I thought I might as well look in and tell you."

"She's quite well, I hope?" said mamma.

"Now did you ever, Mrs. Ware, in all your life, see her quite well? I never did. She would lose all pleasure in life, if she thought she wasn't leaving it. She arrived last night, and summoned me to her at ten this morning. I felt her pulse. It was horribly regular. She had slept well, and breakfasted well, but that was all. In short, I found her suffering under her usual chronic attack of good health, and, as the case was not to be trifled with, I ordered her instantly some medicine which could not possibly

produce any effect whatever; and in that critical state I left her, with a promise to look in again in the afternoon to ascertain that the more robust symptoms were not gaining ground, and in the interval I came to see you and tell you all about it."

"I suppose, then, I should find her in her bed?" said mamma.

"No; I rather think she has postponed dying till after dinner—she ordered a very good one—and means to expire in her sitting-room, where you'll find her. And you have not been very well?"

"Remember the story he has just told you of your aunt Lorrimer, and take care he doesn't tell her the same story of you," said papa, laughing.

"I wish I could," said Doctor Droqville; "few things would please me better. That pain in the nerves of the head is a very real torment."

So he and mamma talked over her headaches in an undertone for some minutes;

and while this was going on there came in a note for mamma. The servant was waiting for an answer in the hall.

"Shall I read it?" said papa, holding it up by the corner. "It is Lady Lorrimer's, I'm sure."

"Do, dear," said mamma, and she continued her confidences in Doctor Droqville's ear.

Papa smiled a little satirically as he read it. He threw it across the table, saying,

"You can read it, Ethel; it concerns you rather."

I was very curious. The hand was youthful and pretty, considering Lady Lorrimer's years. It was a whimpering, apathetic, selfish little note. She was miserable, she said, and had quite made up her mind that she could not exist in London smoke. She had sent for the doctor.

She continued: "I shall make an effort to see you, if you can look in about three, for a few minutes. Have you any of your

children with you? If they are very quiet I should like to see them. It would amuse me. It is an age since I saw your little people, and I really forget their ages, and even their names. Say if I am to expect you at three. I have told the servant to wait."

People who live in the country fancy themselves of more importance than they really are. I was mortified, and almost shocked at the cool sentences about "the little people," &c.

"Well, you promise to be very quiet, won't you? You won't pull the cat's tail, or light paper in the fire, or roar for plum-cake?" said papa.

"I don't think she wants to see us. I don't think she cares the least about us. Perhaps mamma won't go," I said, resentfully, hoping that she would not pay that homage to the insolent old woman.

Doctor Droqville stood up, having written a prescription.

"Well, I'm off; and I think this will do you a world of good. Can I do any commission for you about town; I shall be in every possible direction in the next three hours?"

No, there was nothing; and this man, whom I somehow liked less than ever, although he rather amused me, vanished, and we saw his cab drive by the window.

"Well, here's her note. You'll go to see her, I suppose?" said papa.

"Certainly; I have a great affection for my aunt. She was very kind to me when there was no one else to care about me."

Mamma spoke with more animation than I believed her capable of—I thought I even saw tears in her eyes. It struck me that she did not like papa's tone in speaking about her. The same thing probably struck him.

"You are quite right, darling, as you always are in a matter of feeling, and you'll take Ethel, won't you?"

"Yes, I should like her to come."

"And you know, if she should ask you, don't tell her I'm a bit better off than I really am. I have had some awful losses lately. I don't like bothering you about business, and it was no fault or negligence of mine; but I really—it is of very great importance she should not do anything less that she intended for you, or anything whimsical or unjust. I give you my honour there isn't a guinea to spare now, it would be a positive cruelty."

Mamma looked at him, but she was by this time so accustomed to alarms of that kind that they did not make a very deep impression upon her.

"I don't think she's likely to talk about such matters, dear," said mamma; "but if she should make any inquiries, I shall certainly tell her the truth."

I remembered Lady Lorrimer long ago at Malory. It was a figure seen in the haze of infancy, and remembered through the dis-

tance of many years. I recollect coming down the stairs, the nursery-maid holding me by the hand, and seeing a carriage and servants in the court before the door. I remember, as part of the same dream, sitting in the lap of a strange lady in the drawing-room, who left a vague impression of having been richly dressed, who talked to me in a sweet, gentle voice, and gave me toys, and whom I always knew to have been Lady Lorrimer. How much of this I actually saw, and how much was picked up with the vivid power of reproducing pictures from description that belongs to children, I cannot say; but I always heard of Aunt Lorrimer afterwards with interest, and now at length I was about to see her. Her note had disappointed me, still I was curious.

CHAPTER II.

LADY LORRIMER.

MY curiosity was soon gratified. After luncheon we drove to Mivart's, and there in her sitting-room I saw Lady Lorrimer. I was agreeably surprised. Her figure was still beautiful. She was, I believe, past sixty then; but, like all our family whom I have ever seen, she looked a great deal younger than her years. I thought her very handsome, very like my idea of Mary Queen of Scots in her later years; and her good looks palpably owed nothing to "making up." Her smile was very winning, and her eyes still soft and brilliant. Through so many years, her voice as she

greeted us returned with a strange and very sweet recognition upon my ear.

She put her arms about mamma's neck, and kissed her tenderly. In like manner she kissed me. She made me sit beside her on a sofa, and held my hand in hers. Mamma sat opposite in a chair.

Lady Lorrimer might be very selfish—lonely people often are; but she certainly was very affectionate. There were tears in her fine eyes as she looked at me. It was not such a stare as a dealer might bestow on a picture, to which, as a child, I had sometimes been subjected by old friends in search of a likeness. By-and-by she talked of me.

"The flight of my years is so silent," she said, with a sad smile to mamma, "that I forgot, as I wrote to you, how few are left me, and that Ethel is no longer a child. I think her quite lovely; she is like what I remember you, but it is only a likeness—not the same; she does not sacrifice her origin-

ality. I'm not afraid, dear, to say all that before you," she said, turning on me for a moment her engaging smile. "I think, Ethel, in this world, where people without a particle of merit are always pushing themselves to the front, young people who have beauty should know it. But, my dear," she said, looking on me again, "good looks don't last very long. Your mamma, there, keeps hers wonderfully; but look at me. I was once a pretty girl, as you are now; and see what I am!

'Le même cours des planètes
Régle nos jours et nos nuits;
On me vit ce que vous êtes,
Vous serez ce que je suis.'

So I qualify my agreeable truths with a little uncomfortable morality. She'll be coming out immediately?"

Mamma told her, hereupon, all her plans about me.

"And so sure as you take her out, her papa will be giving her away; and, remember, I'm to give her her diamonds whenever

she marries. You are to write to me whenever anything is settled, or likely to come about. They always know at my house here, when I am on my travels, where a letter will find me. No, you're not to thank me," she interrupted us. "I saw Lady Rimington's, and I intend that your daughter's shall be a great deal better than hers."

Our old Malory housekeeper, Rebecca Torkill, had a saying, "Nothing so grateful as pride." I think I really liked my aunt Lorrimer better for her praises of my good looks than for her munificent intentions about my bridal brilliants. But for either I could only show my pleasure by my looks. I started up to thank her for her promised diamonds. But, as I told you, she would not hear a word, and drew me down gently with a smile again beside her.

Then she talked, and mamma talked. For such a recluse, Lady Lorrimer was a wonderful gossip, and devoured all mamma's

news, and told her old stories of all the old people who still figured in such oral history. I must do her justice. There seemed to me to be no malice whatever in her stories. The comic was what she enjoyed most. Her lively pictures amused even me, who knew nothing of the originals; and the longer I sat with her, the more confidence did I feel in her good-nature.

A good deal of this conversation was all but whispered, and she had despatched me with her maid to look at some china she had brought home for her cabinets in London, at the other end of the room. When I returned their heads were still very near, and they were talking low with the same animation. I sat down again beside Lady Lorrimer. I had spun out my inspection of the china as long as I could. Lady Lorrimer patted my head gently, as I sat down again, without, I fancy, remembering at the moment that I had been away. She was answering, I think, a remark of

mamma's, and upon a subject which had lain rather heavily at my heart since Monsieur Droqville's visit to our breakfast-table that morning.

"I don't know," she said; "Monsieur Droqville is a clever physician, but it seems to me he has always made too much of Mr. Carmel's illness, or delicacy, or whatever it is. I do not think Mr. Carmel is in any real danger—I don't think there is anything seriously wrong with him—more, in fact, than with any other thin young man, and now and then he has a cough. Three years ago, when I first made his acquaintance—and what a charming creature he is!—Monsieur Droqville told me he could not live more than two years; and this morning, when I asked how Mr. Carmel was, he allowed him three years still to live; so if he goes on killing him at that easy rate, he may live as long as Old Parr. And now that I think of it, did you hear a rumour about Sir Harry?"

"There are so many Sir Harrys," said

mamma. "Do you mean Sir Harry Rokestone?"

"Of course I mean Sir Harry Rokestone," she answered; "have you heard anything of him?"

"Nothing, but the old story," said mamma.

"And what is that?" asked Lady Lorrimer.

"Only that he hates us with all his heart and soul, and never loses an opportunity of doing us all the mischief he can. He has twice prevented my husband getting into the House—and cost him a great deal more money than he could afford; and he has had opportunities, from those old money dealings that you know of between the two families, of embarrassing my poor husband most cruelly. If you knew what enormous law expenses we have been put to, and all the injuries he has done us, you would say that you never heard of anything so implacable, so malignant, and——"

"So natural," said Lady Lorrimer. "I don't mean to fight Sir Harry Rokestone's battle for him. I dare say he has been stern and vindictive; he was a proud, fierce man; and, my dear Mabel, you treated him very ill; so did Francis Ware. If he treats you as you have treated him, nothing can be much worse. I always liked him better than your husband; he was better, and is better. I use the privilege of an old kinswoman; and I say nothing could have been more foolish than your treatment of him, except your choice of a husband. I think Francis Ware is one of those men who never ought to have married. He is a clever man; but in some respects, and these of very great importance, he has always acted like a fool. Harry Rokestone was worth twenty of him, and would have made a much better husband than ever he did. I always thought he was the handsomer man; he had twice the real ability of Francis Ware; he had all the masculine attributes of mind. I say

nothing about his immensely superior wealth; that you chose to regard as a point quite unworthy of consideration. The only thing not in his favour was that he was some years older."

"Twenty years nearly," said mamma.

"Well, my dear, a man with his peculiar kind of good looks, and his commanding character, wears better than a younger man. You recollect the answer of the old French mareschal to the young *petit-maître* who asked him his age. '*Je ne vous le dirai pas precisement; mais soyez sur qu'un âne est plus âgé à vingt ans qu'un homme ne l'est à soixante.*' I don't say that the term would have fairly described Francis Ware. I know very well he was brilliant; but those talents, if there are no more solid gifts to support them, grow less and less suitable as men get into years, until they become frivolous. However, I am sure that Harry Rokestone does hate you both; and he's just the man to make his hatred felt. The time has

passed for forgiveness. When the fire of romance has expired, the metal that might have taken another shape cools down and hardens in the mould. He will never forgive or change, I am afraid; and you must both lay your account with his persevering animosity. But, you say, you haven't heard any story about him lately?"

"No, nothing."

"Well, old Mrs. Jennings, of Golden Friars, sometimes writes to me, and she says he is going to marry that rich spinster, Miss Goulding of Wrybiggins. She only says she hears so; and I thought you might know."

"I should not wonder—it is not at all an unlikely thing. I don't see that they could do better; there's nothing to prevent it, so far as I can see."

But although mamma thus applauded the arrangement, I could see that in her inmost heart she did not like it. There is something of desertion in these late marriages of

long-cast-off lovers, who have worshipped our shadows in secret, through lonely years; and I could see dimly a sad little mortification in mamma's pretty face.

As we drove home I mused over Lady Lorrimer. The only disagreeable recollection that disturbed my pleasant retrospect was that part of her conversation that referred to papa. She said she "used the privilege of an old kinswoman." I should have said abused it rather. But mamma did not seem to resent it—I suppose they were on terms to discuss him; and they either forgot me, or thought I had no business to be in the way. In every other respect, I was very much pleased with my visit, as I well might be. She was much more clever than I expected, more animated, more fascinating. I was haunted with the thought how lovely she must have been when she was young!

"Don't a great many older women than Lady Lorrimer go out a great deal?" I asked.

"Yes," answered mamma, "but they have young people to take out very often."

"But papa mentioned some this morning, who are everywhere, and never chaperon any one."

"I suppose they enjoy it, as they can't live without it. Pull up that window, dear."

"I wonder very much she doesn't go out; she's so handsome, really beautiful, considering her years, I think; and so very agreeable."

"I suppose she doesn't care," she answered, a little drily.

"But she complained of being lonely," I resumed, "and I thought she sighed when she spoke of my coming out, as if she would like a look at the gay world again."

"My dear, you bore me; I suppose Lady Lorrimer will do, with respect to that, as she does about everything else—precisely what pleases her best."

These words mamma spoke in a way that very plainly expressed: "Now you

have heard, once for all, everything I mean to say on this subject; and you will be good enough to talk and think of something quite different."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT CAN SHE MEAN?

WE had promised to go to see Lady Lorrimer again next day at the same hour. My head was still full of her. Mamma did not come down to breakfast; so I interrupted papa at his newspaper to sound him, very much as I had sounded her.

"Why doesn't she stay at home, and go out?" he repeated, smiling faintly as he did so. "I suppose she understands her own business; I can't say—but you mustn't say anything of that kind before her. She has done some foolish things, and got herself talked about; and you'll hear it all, I dare-say, time enough. She's not a bit worse

than other people, but a much greater fool; so don't ask people those questions, it would vex your mamma, and do nobody any good, do you see?"

Shortly after this, Miss Pounden came down to tell me that we were not going to see Lady Lorrimer that day. I was horribly disappointed, and ran up to the drawing-room, where mamma then was, to learn the cause of our visit being put off.

"Here, dear, is my aunt's note," she said, handing it to me, and scarcely interrupting her consultation with her maid about the millinery they were discussing. It was open, and I read these words:

"My Dear Mabel,—I must say good-bye a little earlier than I had intended. My plans are upset. I find my native air insupportable, and fly northward for my life! I am thinking at present of Buxton for a few days; the weather is so genial here, that my doctor tells me I may find it still endur-

able in that cold region. It grieves me not to see your dear faces before I go. Do not let your pretty daughter forget me. I may, it is just possible, return through London—so we may meet soon again. I shall have left Mivart's and begun my journey before this note reaches you. God bless you, my dear Mabel!

"Your affectionate

"AUNT."

So she was actually gone! What a dull day it would be! Well, there was no good in railing at fate. But was I ever to see that charming lady more?

In my drive that day with Miss Pounden, thinking it was just possible that Lady Lorrimer, whimsical as she was said to be, might have once more changed her mind, I called at Mivart's to inquire. She was no longer there. She had left with bag and baggage, and all her servants, that morning at nine o'clock. I had called with very little hope

of finding that her journey had been delayed, and I drove away with even that small hope extinguished. She was my Mary, Queen of Scots. She had done something too rash and generous for the epicurean, sarcastic, and specious society of London. From the little that papa had said, I conjectured that Lady Lorrimer's secession from society was not quite voluntary; but she interested me all the more. In my dull life the loss of my new acquaintance so soon was a real blow. Mamma was not much of a companion to me. She liked to talk of people she knew, and to people who knew them. Except what concerned my dress and accomplishments, we had as yet no topics in common.

Dear Laura Grey, how I missed you now! The resentment I had felt at first was long since quite lost in my real sorrow, and there remained nothing but affectionate regrets.

I take up the thread of my personal nar-

rative where I dropped it on the day of my ineffectual visit at Lady Lorrimer's hotel. In the afternoon Doctor Droqville came to see mamma. He had been to see Lady Lorrimer that morning, just before she set out on her journey.

"She was going direct to Buxton, as she hinted to you," said Doctor Droqville, "and I advised her to make a week's stay there. When she leaves it, she says she is going on to Westmoreland, and to stay for a fortnight or three weeks at Golden Friars. She's fanciful; there was gout in her family, and she is full of gouty whims and horrors. She is as well as a woman of her years need be, if she would only believe it."

"Have you heard lately from Mr. Carmel?" asked mamma.

I listened with a great deal of interest for the answer.

"Yes, I heard this morning," he replied. "He's in Wales."

"Not at Malory?" said mamma.

"No, not at Malory; a good way from Malory."

I should have liked to ask how long he had been in Wales, for I had been secretly offended at his apparent neglect of me; but I could not muster courage for the question.

Next morning I took it into my head that I should like a walk; and with mamma's leave, Miss Pounden and I set out, of course keeping among the quiet streets in the neighbourhood. While, as we walked, I was in high chat with Miss Pounden, who was chiefly a listener, and sometimes, I must admit, a rather absent one, I raised my eyes and could scarcely believe their report. Not ten yards away, walking up the flagged way towards us, were two figures. One was Lady Lorrimer I was certain. She was dressed in a very full velvet cloak, and had a small book in her hand. At her left, at a distance of more than a yard, walked a woman in a peculiar costume. This woman looked surly, and stumped beside her with

a limp, as if one leg were shorter than the other. They approached at a measured pace, looking straight before them, and in total silence.

My eyes were fixed on Lady Lorrimer with a smile, which I every moment expected would be answered by one of recognition from her. But no such thing. She must have seen me; but nearer and nearer they came. They never deviated from their line of march. Lady Lorrimer continued to look straight before her. It was the sternest possible "cut," insomuch that I felt actually incredulous, and began to question my first identification. Her velvet actually brushed my dress as I stood next the railings. She passed me with her head high, and the same stony look.

"Shall we go on, dear?" asked Miss Pounden, who did not understand why we had come to a standstill.

I moved on in silence; but the street being a very quiet one, I turned about for a

last look. I saw them ascend the steps of a house, and at the same moment the door opened, and Mr. Carmel came out, with his hat in his hand, and followed the two ladies in. The door was then shut. We resumed our walk homeward. We had a good many streets to go through, and I did not know my way. I was confounded, and walked on in utter silence, looking down in confused rumination on the flags under my feet.

Till we got home I did not say a word; and then I sat down in my room, and meditated on that odd occurrence, as well as my perturbation would let me. It was a strange mixture of surprise, doubt, and intense mortification. It was very stupid of me not to have ascertained at the time the name of the street which was the scene of this incident. Miss Pounden had never seen either Lady Lorrimer or Mr. Carmel; and the occurrence had not made the least impression upon her. She could not therefore

help me, ever so little, next day, to recover the name of the street in which I had stood still for a few seconds, looking at she knew not what. There was just a film of doubt, derived from the inexplicable behaviour of the supposed Lady Lorrimer. When I told mamma, she at first insisted it was quite impossible. But, as I persisted, and went into detail, she said it was very odd. She was thoughtful for a little time, and sighed. Then she made me repeat all I had told her, and seemed very uncomfortable, but did not comment upon it. At length she said:

"You must promise me, Ethel, not to say a word about it to your papa. It would only lead to vexation. I have good reasons for thinking so. Speak of it to no one. Let the matter rest. I don't think I shall ever understand some people. But let us talk about it no more."

And with this charge the subject dropped.

CHAPTER IV.

A SEMI-QUARREL.

MAMMA did not remain long in town. Bleak as the weather now was, she and papa went to Brighton for a fortnight. Then they went, for a few days, to Malory; and from that, northward, to Golden Friars. I dare say papa would have liked to find Lady Lorrimer there. I don't know that he did.

I, meanwhile, was left in the care of Miss Pounden, who made a very staid and careful chaperon. I danced every day, and pounded a piano, and sang a little, and spoke French incessantly to Miss Pounden.

My spirits were sustained by the consciousness that I was very soon to come out. I was not entirely abandoned to Miss Pounden's agreeable society. Mr. Carmel re-appeared. Three times a week he came in and read, and spoke Italian with me for an hour, Miss Pounden sitting by—at least, she was supposed to be sitting there on guard—but she really was as often out of the room as in it. One day I said to him:

"You know Lady Lorrimer, my aunt?"

"Yes," he answered, carelessly.

"Did you know she was my aunt?"

"Your great-aunt, yes."

"I wonder, then, why you never mentioned her to me," said I.

"There is nothing to wonder at," he replied, with a smile. "Respecting her, I have no curiosity, and nothing to tell."

"Oh! But you must know something about her—ever so little—and I really know nothing. Why does she lead so melancholy a life?"

"She has sickened of gaiety, I have been told."

"There's something more than that," I insisted.

"She's not young, you know, and society is a laborious calling."

"There's some reason; none of you will tell me," I said. "I used to tell everyone everything, until I found that no one told me anything; now I say, 'Ethel, seal your lips, and open your ears; don't you be the only fool in this listening, sly, suspicious world.' But, if you'll tell me nothing else, at least you'll tell me this. What were you all about when you opened the door of a house, in some street not far from this, to Lady Lorrimer, and an odd-looking woman who was walking beside her, on the day after she had written to mamma to say she had actually left London. What was the meaning of that deception?"

"I don't know whether Lady Lorrimer out-stayed the time of her intended depart-

ure or not," he answered; "she would write what she pleased, and to whom she pleased, without telling me. And now I must tell you, if Lady Lorrimer had confided a harmless secret to me, I should not betray it by answering either 'yes' or 'no' to any questions. Therefore, should you question me upon any such subject, you must not be offended if I am silent."

I was vexed.

"One thing you must tell me," I persisted. "I have been puzzling myself over her very odd looks that day; and also over the odd manner and disagreeable countenance of the woman who was walking at her side. Is Lady Lorrimer, at times, a little out of her mind?"

"Who suggested that question?" he asked, fixing his eyes suddenly on me.

"Who suggested it?" I repeated. "No one. People, I suppose, can ask their own questions."

I was surprised and annoyed, and I sup-

pose looked so. I continued: "That woman looked like a keeper, I fancied, and Lady Lorrimer—I don't know what it was—but there was something so unaccountable about her."

"I don't know a great deal of Lady Lorrimer, but I am grateful to her for, at least, one great kindness, that of having introduced me to your family," he said; "and I can certainly testify that there is no clearer mind anywhere. No suspicion of that kind can approach her; she is said to be one of the cleverest, shrewdest intellects, and the most cultivated, you can imagine. But people say she is an *esprit fort*, and believes in nothing. It does not prevent her doing a kind office for a person such as I. She has more charity than many persons who make loud professions of faith."

I had felt a little angry during this short dialogue. He was practising reserve, and he looked at one time a little stern, and unlike himself.

"But I want to ask you a question—only one more," I said, for I wished to clear up my doubts.

"Certainly," he said, more like himself.

"About my meeting Lady Lorrimer that day, and seeing you, as I told you." I paused, and he simply sat listening. "My question," I continued, "is this—I may as well tell you; the whole thing appeared to me so unaccountable that I have been ever since doubting the reality of what I saw; and I want you simply to tell me whether it did happen as I have described?"

At this renewed attack, Mr. Carmel's countenance underwent no change, even the slightest, that could lead me to an inference; he said, with a smile:

"It might, perhaps, be the easiest thing in the world for me to answer distinctly, 'no;' but I remember that Dean Swift, when asked a certain question, said that Lord Somers had once told him never to give a negative answer, although truth

would warrant it, to a question of that kind; because, if he made that his habit, when he could give a denial, whenever he declined to do so, it would amount to an admission. I think that a wise rule, and all such questions I omit to answer."

"That is an evasion," I replied, in high indignation.

"Forgive me, it is no evasion—it is simply silence."

"You know it is cowardly, and indirect, and—characteristic," I persisted, in growing wrath.

He was provokingly serene.

"Well, let me give you another reason for silence respecting Lady Lorrimer. Your mamma has specially requested me to keep silence on the subject; and in your case, Miss Ethel, her daughter, can I consider that request otherwise than as a command?"

"Not comprehending casuistry, I don't quite see how your promise to papa, to observe silence respecting the differences of

the two Churches, is less binding than your promise to mamma of silence respecting Lady Lorrimer."

"Will you allow me to answer that sarcasm?" he asked, flushing a little.

"How I hate hypocrisy and prevarication!" I repeated, rising even above my old level of scorn.

"I have been perfectly direct," he said, "upon that subject; for the reason I have mentioned, I can't and won't speak."

"Then for the present, I think, we shall talk upon no other," I said, getting up, going out of the room, and treating him at the door to a haughty little bow.

So we parted for that day.

I understood Mr. Carmel, however; I knew that he had acted as he always did when he refused to do what other people wished, from a reason that was not to be overcome; and I don't recollect that I ever renewed my attack. We were on our old terms in a day or two. Between the stanzas

of Tasso, often for ten minutes unobserved, he talked upon the old themes—eternity, faith, the Church, the saints, the Blessed Virgin. He supplied me with books; but this borrowing and lending was secret as the stolen correspondence of lovers.

I have thought over that strange period of my life: the little books that wrought such wonders, the spell of whose power is broken now; the tone of mind induced by them, by my solitude, my agitations, the haunting affections of the dead; and all these influences re-acting again upon the cold and supernatural character of Mr. Carmel's talk. My exterior life had been going on, the rural monotony of Malory, its walks, its boating, its little drives; and now the dawning ambitions of a more vulgar scene, the town life, the excitement of a new world were opening. But among these realities, ever recurring, and dominating all, there seemed to be ever present a stupendous vision!

So it seemed to me my life was divided

between frivolous realities and a gigantic trance. Into this I receded every now and then, alone and unwatched. The immense perspective of a towering cathedral aisle seemed to rise before me, shafts and ribbed stone, lost in smoke of incense floating high in air; mitres and gorgeous robes, and golden furniture of the altar, and chains of censers and jewelled shrines, glimmering far off in the tapers' starlight, and the inspired painting of the stupendous Sacrifice reared above the altar in dim reality. I fancied I could hear human voices, plaintive and sublime as the aerial choirs heard high over dying saints and martyrs by faithful ears; and the mellow thunder of the organ rolling through unseen arches above. Sometimes, less dimly, I could see the bowed heads of myriads of worshippers, "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues." It was, to my visionary senses, the symbol of the Church. Always the

self-same stupendous building, the same sounds and sights, the same high-priest and satellite bishops; but seen in varying lights —now in solemn beams, striking down and crossing the shadow in mighty bars of yellow, crimson, green, and purple through the stained windows, and now in the dull red gleam of the tapers.

Was I more under the influence of religion in this state? I don't believe I was. My imagination was exalted, my anxiety was a little excited, and the subject generally made me more uncomfortable than it did before. Some of the forces were in action which might have pushed me, under other circumstances, into a decided course. One thing, which logically had certainly no bearing upon the question, did affect me, I now know, powerfully. There was a change in Mr. Carmel's manner which wounded me, and piqued my pride. I used to think he took an interest in Ethel Ware. He seemed now to feel none, except in the discharge of

his own missionary duties, and I fancied that, if it had not been for his anxiety to acquit himself of a task imposed by others, and exacted by his conscience, I should have seen no more of Mr. Carmel.

I was a great deal too proud to let him perceive my resentment—I was just as usual —I trifled and laughed, read my Italian, and made blunders, and asked questions; and, in those intervals of which I have spoken, I listened to what he had to say, took the books he offered, and thanked him with a smile, but with no great fervour. The temperature of our town drawing-room was perceptibly cooler than that of Malory, and the distance between our two chairs had appreciably increased. Nevertheless, we were apparently, at least, very good friends.

But terms like these are sometimes difficult to maintain. I was vexed at his seeming to acquiesce so easily in my change of manner, which, imperceptible to anyone else, I somehow knew could not be hidden

from him. I had brought down, and laid on the drawing-room table at which we sat, the only book which I then had belonging to Mr. Carmel. It was rather a dark day. Something in the weather made me a little more cross than usual. Miss Pounden was, according to her wont, flitting to and fro, and not minding in the least what we read or said. I laid down my Tasso, and laughed. Mr. Carmel looked at me a little puzzled.

"That, I think, is the most absurd stanza we have read. I ought, I suppose, to say the most sublime. But it is as impossible to read it without laughing as to read the rest without yawning."

I said this with more scorn than I really felt, but it certainly was one of those passages in which good Homer nods. A hero's head is cut off, I forget his name—a kinsman, I daresay, of Saint Denis; and he is so engrossed with the battle that he forgets his loss, and goes on fighting for some time.

"I hope it is not very wrong, and very

stupid, but I am so tired of the *Gerusalemme Liberata.*"

He looked at me for a moment or two. I think he did not comprehend the spirit in which I said all this, but perhaps he suspected something of it—he looked a little pained.

"But, I hope, you are not tired of Italian? There are other authors."

"Yes, so there are. I should like Ariosto, I daresay. I like fairy-tales, and that is the reason, I think, I like reading the lives of the saints, and the other books you have been so kind as to lend me."

I said this quite innocently, but there was a great deal of long-husbanded cruelty in it. He dropped his fine eyes to the table, and leaned for a short time on his hand.

"Well, even so, it is something gained to have read them," meditated Mr. Carmel, and looking up at me, he added, "and we never know by what childish instincts and

simple paths we may be led to the sublimest elevations."

There was so much gentleness in his tone and looks that my heart smote me. My momentary compunction, however, did not prevent my going on, now that I had got fairly afloat.

"I have brought down the book you were so kind as to lend me last week. I am sure it is very eloquent, but there's so much I cannot understand."

"Can I explain anything?" he began, taking up the book at the same time.

"I did not mean that—no. I was going to return it, with my very best thanks," I said. "I have been reading a great deal that is too high for me—books meant for wiser people and deeper minds than mine."

"The mysteries of faith remain, for all varieties of mind, mysteries still," he answered sadly. "No human vision can pierce the veil. I do not flatter you, but I have

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met with no brighter intelligence than yours. In death the scales will fall from our eyes. Until then, yea must be yea, and nay, nay, and let us be patient."

"I don't know, Mr. Carmel, that I ought to read these books without papa's consent. I have imperceptibly glided into this kind of reading. 'I will tell you about Swedenborg,' you said; 'we must not talk of Rome or Luther—we can't agree, and they are forbidden subjects,' do you remember? And then you told me what an enemy Swedenborg was of the Catholic Church—you remember that? And then you read me what he said about vastation, as he calls it; and you lent me the book to read; and when you took it back, you explained to me that his account of vastation differs in no respect from purgatory; and in the same way, when I read the legends of the saints, you told me a great deal more of your doctrine; and in the same way, also, you discussed those beautiful old hymns, so that in a little while,

although, as you said, Rome and Luther were forbidden subjects, or rather names, I found myself immersed in a controversy, which I did not understand, with a zealous and able priest. You have been artful, Mr. Carmel!"

"Have I been artful in trying to save you?" he answered gently.

"You would not, I think, practise the same arts with other people—you treat me like a fool," I said. "You would not treat that Welsh lady so, whom you visit—I mean—I really forget her name, but you remember all about her."

He rose unconsciously, and looked for a minute from the window.

"A good priest," he said, returning, "is no respecter of persons. Blessed should I be if I could beguile a benighted traveller into safety! Blessed and happy were my lot if I could die in the endeavour thus to save one human soul bent on self-destruction!"

His answer vexed me. The theological level on which he placed all human souls did not please me. After all our friendly evenings at Malory, I did not quite understand his being, as he seemed to boast, no "respecter of persons."

"I am sure that is quite right," I said, carelessly; "and very prudent, too, because, if you were to lose your life in converting me, or a Hottentot chief, or anyone else, you would, you think, go straight to heaven; so, after all, the wish is not altogether too heroic for this selfish world."

He smiled; but there was doubt, I thought, in the eyes which he turned for a moment upon me.

"Our motives are so mixed," he said, "and death, besides, is to some men less than happier people think; my life has been austere and afflicted; and what remains of it will, I know, be darker. I see sometimes where all is drifting. I never was so happy, and I never shall be, as I have been for a

time at Malory. I shall see that place perhaps no more. Happy the people whose annals are dull!" he smiled. "How few believe that well-worn saying in their own case! Yet, Miss Ethel, when you left Malory, you left quiet behind you, perhaps for ever!"

He was silent; I said nothing. The spirit of what he had said echoed, though he knew it not, the forebodings of my own heart. The late evening sun was touching with its slanting beams the houses opposite, and the cold grimy brick in which the dingy taste of our domestic architecture some forty years before delighted; and as I gazed listlessly from my chair, through the window, on the dismal formality of the street, I saw in the same sunlight nothing of those bricks and windows: I saw Malory and the church-tower, the trees, the glimmering blue of the estuary, the misty mountains, all fading in the dreamy quietude of the declining light, and I sighed.

"Well, then," he said, closing the book, "we close Tasso here. If you care to try Ariosto, I shall be only too happy. Shall we commence to-morrow? And as for our other books, those I mean that you were good enough to read——"

"I'm not afraid of them," I said; "we shan't break our old Malory custom yet; and I ought to be very grateful to you, Mr. Carmel."

His countenance brightened, but the unconscious reproach of his wounded look still haunted me. And after he was gone, with a confusion of feelings which I could not have easily analysed, I laid my hands over my eyes, and cried for some time, bitterly.

CHAPTER V.

MY BOUQUET.

I REMEMBER so vividly the night of my first ball. The excitement of the toilet; mamma's and the maid's consultations and debates; the tremulous anticipations; the "pleasing terror;" the delightful, anxious flutter, and my final look in the tall glass. I hardly knew myself. I gazed at myself with the irrepressible smile of elation. I never had looked so well. There are degrees of that delightful excitement that calls such tints to girlish cheeks, and such fires to the eyes, as visit them no more in our wiser after-life. The enchantment wanes, and the flowers and brilliants fade, and we soon

cease to see them. I went down to the drawing-room to wait for mamma. The candles were lighted, and whom should I find there but Mr. Carmel?

"I asked your mamma's leave to come and see you dressed for your first ball," he said. "How very pretty it all is!"

He surveyed me, smiling with a melancholy pride, it seemed to me, in my good looks and brilliant dress.

"No longer, and never more, the Miss Ethel of my quiet Malory recollections. Going out at last! If anyone can survive the ordeal and come forth scathless, you, I think, will. But to me it seems that this is a farewell, and that my pupil dies to-night, and a new Miss Ethel returns. You cannot help it; all the world cannot prevent it, if so it is to be. As an old friend, I knew I might bring you these."

"Oh, Mr. Carmel, what beautiful flowers!" I exclaimed.

It was certainly an exquisite bouquet;

one of those beautiful and costly offerings that perish in an hour, and seem to me like the pearl thrown into the cup of wine.

"I am so grateful. It was so kind of you. It is too splendid a great deal. It is quite impossible that there can be anything like it in the room."

I was really lost in wonder and admiration, and I suppose looked delighted. I was pleased that my flowers should have come from Mr. Carmel's hand.

"If you think that the flowers are worthy of you, you think more highly than I do of them," he answered, with a smile that was at once sad and pleased. "I am such an old friend, you know; a month at quiet Malory counts for a year anywhere else. And as you say of the flowers, I may say more justly of my pupil, there will be no one like her there. It is the compensation of being such as I, that we may speak frankly, like good old women, and no one be offended. And, oh, Miss Ethel, may

God grant they be not placed like flowers upon a sacrifice or on the dead. Do not forget your better thoughts. You are entering scenes of illusion, where there is little charity, and almost no sincerity, where cruel feelings are instilled, the love of flattery and dominion awakened, and all the evil and enchantments of the world beset you. Encourage those good thoughts; watch and pray, or a painless and even pleasant death sets in, and no one can arrest it."

How my poor father would have laughed at such an exhortation at the threshold of a ball-room! No doubt it had its comic side, but not for me, and that was all Mr. Carmel cared for.

This was a ball at an official residence, and besides the usual muster, Cabinet and other Ministers would be there, and above all, that judicious rewarder of public virtue, and instructor of the conscience of the hustings, the patronage secretary of the Trea-

sury. Papa had at last discovered a constituency which he thought promised success, and he made it a point, of course, to go to places where he had opportunities for a talk with that important personage. Papa was very sanguine, and now, as usual, whenever he had a project of that kind on hand, was in high spirits.

He came into the drawing-room. He always seemed to me as if he did not quite know whether he liked or disliked Mr. Carmel. Whenever I saw them together, he appeared to me, like Mrs. Malaprop, to begin with a little aversion, and gradually to become more and more genial. He greeted Mr. Carmel a little coldly, and brightened as he looked on me; he was evidently pleased with me, and talked me over with myself very good-humouredly. I took care to show him my flowers. He could not help admiring them.

"These are the best flowers I have seen anywhere. How did you contrive to get

them? Really, Mr. Carmel, you are a great deal too kind. I hope Ethel thanked you. Ethel, you ought really to tell Mr. Carmel how very much obliged you are."

"Oh! she has thanked me a great deal too much; she has made me quite ashamed," said he.

And so we talked on, waiting for mamma, and I remember papa said he wondered how Mr. Carmel, who had lived in London and at Oxford, and at other places, where in one kind of life or another one really does live, contrived to exist month after month at Malory, and he drew an amusing and cruel picture of its barbarism and the nakedness of the town of Cardyllion. Mr. Carmel took up the cudgels for both, and I threw in a word wherever I had one to say. I remember this laughing debate, because it led to this little bit of dialogue.

"I fortunately never bought many things there—two brushes, I remember; all their hairs fell out, and they were bald before the

combs they sent for to London arrived. If I had been dependent on the town of Cardyllion, I should have been reduced to a state of utter simplicity."

"Oh, but I assure you, papa, they have a great many very nice things at Jones's shop in Castle Street," I remonstrated.

"Certainly not for one's dressing-room. There are tubs at the regattas, and sponges at their dinners, I daresay," papa began, in a punning vein.

"But you'll admit that London supplies no such cosmetics as Malory," said Mr. Carmel, with a kind glance at me.

"Well, you have me there, I admit," laughed papa, looking very pleasantly at me, who, no doubt, was at that moment the centre of many wild hopes of his.

Mamma came down now; there was no time to lose. My heart bounded, half with fear. Mr. Carmel came downstairs with us, and saw us into the carriage. He stood at the door-steps smiling, his short cloak

wrapped about him, his hat in his hand. Now the horses made their clattering scramble forward; the carriage was in motion. Mr. Carmel's figure, in the attitude of his last look, receded; he was gone; it was like a farewell to Malory, and we were rolling on swiftly towards the ball-room, and a new life for me.

I am not going to describe this particular ball, nor my sensations on entering this new world, so artifical and astonishing. What an arduous life, with its stupendous excitement, fatigues, and publicity! There were in the new world on which I was entering, of course, personal affections and friendships, as among all other societies of human beings. But the canons on which it governs itself are, it seemed to me, inimical to both. The heart gives little, and requires little there. It assumes nothing deeper than relations of acquaintance; and there is no time to bestow on any other. It is the recognised business of everyone to enjoy, and if people have

pains or misfortunes they had best keep them quite to themselves, and smile. No one has a right to be ailing or unfortunate, much less to talk as if he were so, in that happy valley. Such people are "tainted wethers of the flock," and are bound to abolish themselves forthwith. No doubt kind things are done, and charitable, by people who live in it. But they are no more intended to see the light of that life than Mr. Snake's good-natured actions were. This dazzling microcosm, therefore, must not be expected to do that which it never undertook. Its exertions in pursuit of pleasure are enormous; its exhaustion prodigious; the necessary restorative cycle must not be interrupted by private agonies, small or great. If that were permitted, who could recruit for his daily task? I am relating, after an interval of very many years, the impressions of a person who, then very young, was a denizen of "the world" only for a short time; but the application of these principles of

selfishness seemed to me sometimes ghastly.

One thing that struck me very much in a little time was that society, as it is termed, was so limited in numbers. You might go everywhere, it seemed to me, and see, as nearly as possible, the same people night after night. The same cards always, merely shuffled. This, considering the size and wealth of England and of London, did seem to me unaccountable.

My first season, like that of every girl who is admired and danced with a great deal, was glorified by illusions, chief among which was that the men who danced with me as often as they could every night did honestly adore me. We learn afterwards how much and how little those triumphs mean; that new faces are liked simply because they are new; and that girls are danced with because they are the fashion and dance well. I am not boasting—I was admired; and papa was in high good-humour and spirits. There is sunshine even in that

region; like Winter suns, bright but cold. Such as it is, let the birds of that enchanted forest enjoy it while it lasts; flutter their wings and sing in its sheen, for it may not be for long

CHAPTER VI.

THE KNIGHT OF THE BLACK CASTLE.

MY readings with Mr. Carmel totally ceased; in fact, there was no time for any but that one worship which now absorbed me altogether. Every now and then, however, he was in London, and mamma, in the drawing-room, used at times to converse with him, in so low a tone, so earnestly and so long, that I used to half suspect her of making a shrift, and receiving a whispered absolution. Mamma, indeed, stood as it were with just one foot upon the very topmost point of our "high church," ready to spread her wings, and to float to the still more exalted level of the cross on

the dome of St. Peter's. But she always hesitated when the moment for making the aerial ascent arrived, and was still trembling in her old attitude on her old pedestal.

I don't think mamma's theological vagaries troubled papa. Upon all such matters he talked like a good-natured Sadducee; and if religion could have been carried on without priests, I don't think he would have objected to any of its many forms.

Mamma had Mr. Carmel to luncheon often, during his stay in town. Whenever he could find an opportunity, he talked with me. He struggled hard to maintain his hold upon me. Mamma seemed pleased that he should; yet I don't think that she had made up her mind even upon my case. I daresay, had I then declared myself a "Catholic," she would have been in hysterics. Her own religious state, just then, I could not perfectly understand. I don't think she did. She was very uncomfortable about once a fortnight. Her tremors re-

turned when a cold or any other accident had given her a dull day.

When the season was over, I went with papa and mamma to some country houses, and while they completed their circuit of visits Miss Pounden and I were despatched to Malory. The new world which had dazzled me for a time had not changed me. I had acquired a second self; but my old self was still living. It had not touched my heart, nor changed my simple tastes. I enjoyed the quiet of Malory, and its rural ways, and should have been as happy there as ever, if I could only have recovered the beloved companions whom I missed.

My loneliness was very agreeably relieved one day, as I was walking home from Penruthyn Priory, by meeting Mr. Carmel. He joined me, and we sauntered towards home in very friendly talk. He was to make a little stay at the steward's house. We agreed to read *I Promessi Sposi* together. Malory was recovering its old looks. I asked him

all the news that he was likely to know and I cared to hear.

"Where was Lady Lorrimer?" I inquired.

Travelling, he told me, on the Continent, he could not say where. "We must not talk of her," he said, with a shrug and a laugh. "I think, Miss Ware, we were never so near quarrelling upon any subject as upon Lady Lorrimer, and I then resolved never again to approach that irritating topic."

So with common consent we talked of other things, among which I asked him:

"Do you remember Mr. Marston?"

"You mean the shipwrecked man who was quartered for some days at the steward's house?" he asked. "Yes—I remember him very well." He seemed to grow rather pale as he looked at me, and added, "Why do you ask?"

"Because," I answered, "you told me that he was in good society, and I have not seen him anywhere—not once."

"He was in society; but he's not in London, nor in England now, I believe. I once knew him pretty well, and I know only too much of him. I know him for a villain; and had he been still in England I should have warned you again, Miss Ethel, and warned your mamma, also, against permitting him to claim your acquaintance. But I don't think he will be seen again in this part of the world—not, at all events, until after the death of a person who is likely to live a long time."

"But what has he done?" I asked.

"I can't tell you—I can't tell you how cruelly he has wounded me," he answered. "I have told you in substance all I know, when I say he is a villain."

"I do believe, Mr. Carmel, your mission on earth is to mortify my curiosity. You won't tell me anything of anyone I'm the least curious to hear about."

"He is a person I hate to talk of, or even to think of. He is a villain—he is incorri-

gible—and, happen what may, a villain, I think, he will be to the end."

I was obliged to be satisfied with this, for I had learned that it was a mere waste of time trying to extract from Mr. Carmel any secret which he chose to keep.

Here, then, in the old scenes, our quiet life began for awhile once more. I did not see more of Mr. Carmel now than formerly, and there continued the slightly altered tone, in talk and manner, which had secretly so sorely vexed me in town, and which at times I almost ascribed to my fancy.

Mr. Carmel's stay at Malory was desultory, too, as before; he was often absent for two or three days together. During one of these short absences, there occurred a very trifling incident, which, however, I must mention.

The castle of Cardyllion is a vast ruin, a military fortress of the feudal times, built on a great scale, and with prodigious strength. Its ponderous walls and towers

are covered thick with ivy. It is so vast that the few visitors who are to be found there when the Summer is over, hardly disquiet its wide solitudes and its silence. For a time I induced Miss Pounden to come down there nearly every afternoon, and we used to bring our novels, and she, sometimes her work; and we sat in the old castle, feeling, in the quiet Autumn, as if we had it all to ourselves. The inner court is nearly two hundred feet square, and, ascending a circular stair in the angle next the great gate, you find yourself at the end of a very dark stone-floored corridor, running the entire length of the building. This long passage is lighted at intervals by narrow loop-holes placed at the left; and in the wall to the right, after having passed several doors, you come, about mid-way, to one admitting to the chapel. It is a small stone-floored chamber, with a lofty groined roof, very gracefully proportioned; a tall stone-shafted window admits a scanty light

from the east, over the site of the dismantled altar; deep shadow prevails everywhere else in this pretty chapel, which is so dark in most parts that, in order to read or work, one must get directly under the streak of light that enters through the window, necessarily so narrow as not to compromise the jealous rules of mediæval fortification. A small arch, at each side of the door, opens a view of this chamber from two small rooms, or galleries, reached by steps from this corridor.

We had placed our camp-stools nearly under this window, and were both reading; when I raised my eyes they encountered those of a very remarkable-looking old man, whom I instantly recognised, with a start. It was the man whom we used, long ago, to call the Knight of the Black Castle. His well-formed, bronzed face and features were little changed, except for those lines that time deepens or produces. His dark, fierce eyes were not dimmed by the years that

had passed, but his long black hair, which was uncovered, as tall men in those low passages were obliged to remove their hats, was streaked now with grey. This stern old man was gazing fixedly on me, from the arch beside the door, to my left, as I looked at him, and he did not remove his eyes as mine met his. Sullen, gloomy, stern was the face that remained inflexibly fixed in the deep shadow which enhanced its pallor. I turned with an effort to my companion, and said,

"Suppose we come out, and take a turn in the grounds."

To which, as indeed to everything I proposed, Miss Pounden assented.

I walked for a minute or two about the chapel before I stole a glance backward at the place where I had seen the apparition. He was gone. The arch, and the void space behind, were all that remained; there was nothing but deep shadow where that face had loomed. I asked Miss Pounden if

she had seen the old man looking in; she had not.

Well, we left the chapel, and retraced our steps through the long corridor, I watching through the successive loop-holes for the figure of the old man pacing the grass beneath; but I did not see him. Down the stairs we came, I peeping into every narrow doorway we passed, and so out upon the grassy level of the inner court. I looked in all directions there, but nowhere could I see him. Under the arched gateway, where the portcullis used to clang, we passed into the outer court, and there I peeped about, also in vain.

I dare say Miss Pounden, if she could wonder at anything, wondered what I could be in pursuit of; but that most convenient of women never troubled me with a question.

Through the outer gate, in turn, we passed, and to Richard Pritchard's lodge, at the side of the gate admitting visitors from

Castle Street to the castle grounds. Tall Richard Pritchard, with his thin stoop, his wide-awake hat, brown face, lantern jaws, and perpetual smirk, listened to my questions, and answered that he had let in such a gentleman, about ten minutes before, as I described. This gentleman had given his horse to hold to a donkey-boy outside the gate, and Richard Pritchard went on to say, with his usual volubility, and his curious interpolation of phrases of politeness, without the slightest regard to their connection with the context, but simply to heighten the amiability and polish of his discourse :

"And he asked a deal, miss, about the family down at Malory, I beg your pardon; and when he heard you were there, miss, he asked if you ever came down to the town—yes, indeed. So when I told him that you were in the castle now—very well, I thank you, miss—he asked whereabout in the castle you were likely to be—yes, indeed, miss, very true—and he gave me a

shilling—he did, indeed—and I showed him the way to the chapel—I beg your pardon, miss—where you very often go—very true indeed, miss; and so I left him at the top of the stairs. Ah, ha! yes, indeed, miss; and he came back just two or three minutes, and took his horse and rode down towards the water-gate—very well, I thank you, miss."

This was the substance of Richard Pritchard's information. So, then, he had ridden down Castle Street and out of the town. It was odd his caring to have that look at me. What could he mean by it? His was a countenance ominous of nothing good. After so long an interval, it was not pleasant to see it again, especially associated with inquiries about Malory and its owners, and the sinister attraction which had drawn him to the chapel to gaze upon me, and, as I plainly perceived, by no means with eyes of liking. The years that had immediately followed his last visit, I knew had proved years of

great loss and peril to papa. May Heaven avert the omen! I silently prayed. I knew that old Rebecca Torkill could not help to identify him, for I had been curious on the point before. She could not bring to her recollection the particular scene that had so fixed itself upon my memory; for, as she said, in those evil years there was hardly a day that did not bring down some bawling creditor from London to Malory in search of papa.

CHAPTER VII.

RUSTICATION.

MALORY was not visited that year by either papa or mamma. I had been so accustomed to a lonely life there that my sojourn in that serene and beautiful spot never seemed solitary. Besides, town life would open again for me in the early Spring. Had it not been for that near and exciting prospect, without Laura Grey, I might possibly have felt my solitude more; but the sure return to the whirl and music of the world made my rural weeks precious. They were to end earlier even than our return to town. I was written for, to Roydon, where mamma and papa then were making a short

visit, and was deposited safely in that splendid but rather dull house by Miss Pounden, who sped forthwith to London, where I suppose she enjoyed her liberty in her own quiet way.

I enjoyed very much our flitting from country-house to country-house, and the more familiar society of that kind of life. As these peregrinations and progresses, however, had no essential bearing upon my history, I shall mention them only to say this. At Roydon I met a person whom I very little expected to see there. The same person afterwards turned up at a very much pleasanter house—I mean Lady Mardykes's house at Carsbrook, where a really delightful party were assembled. Who do you think this person was? No titled person—not known to the readers of newspapers, except as a name mentioned now and then as forming a unit in a party at some distinguished house; no brilliant name in the lists of talent; a man apparently not worth pro-

pitiating on any score: and yet everywhere, and knowing everybody! Who, I say, do you suppose he was? Simply Doctor Droqville! In London I had seen him very often. He used to drop in at balls or garden-parties for an hour or two, and vanish. There was a certain decision, animation, and audacity in his talk, which seemed, although I did not like it, to please better judges very well. No one appeared to know much more about him than I did. Some people, I suppose, like mamma, did know quite enough; but by far the greater part took him for granted, and seeing that other people had him at their houses, did likewise.

Very agreeably the interval passed; and in due time we found ourselves once more in London.

My second season wanted something of the brilliant delirium of the first; and yet, I think I enjoyed it more. Papa was not in such spirits by any means. I dare say, as

my second season drew towards its close, he was disappointed that I was not already a peeress. But papa had other grounds for anxiety; and very anxious he began to look. It was quite settled now that at the next election he was to stand for the borough of Shillingsworth, with the support of the Government. Everyone said he would do very well in the House; but that we ought to have begun earlier. Papa was full of it; but somehow not quite so sanguine and cheery as he used to be about his projects. I had seen ministers looking so haggard and overworked, and really suffering at times, that I began to think that politics were as fatiguing a pursuit almost as pleasure. The iron seemed to have entered into poor papa's soul already.

Although our breakfast hour was late, mamma was hardly ever down to it, and I not always. But one day when we did happen to be all three at breakfast together, he put down his newspaper with a rustle on

his knee, and said to mamma, "I have been intending to ask you this long time, and I haven't had an opportunity—or at least it has gone out of my head when I might have asked; have you been writing lately to Lady Lorrimer?"

"Yes, I—at least, I heard from her, a little more than a week ago—a very kind letter—she wrote from Naples—she has been there for the Winter."

"And quite well?"

"Complaining a little, as usual; but I suppose she is really quite well."

"I wish she did not hate me quite so much as she does," said papa. "I'd write to her myself—I dare say you haven't answered her letter?"

"Well, really, you know, just now it is not easy to find time," mamma began.

"Oh! hang it, time! Why, you forget you have really nothing to do," answered papa, more tartly than I had ever heard him speak to mamma before. "You don't

answer her letters, I think; at least not for months after you get them! I don't wish you to flatter her—I wish that as little as you do—but I think you might be civil—where's the good of irritating her?"

"I never said I saw any," answered mamma, a little high.

"No; but I see the mischief of it," he continued; "it's utter folly—and it's not right, besides. You'll just lose her, that'll be the end of it—she is the only one of your relations who really cares anything about you—and she intends making Ethel a present—diamonds—it is just, I do believe, that she wishes to show what she intends further. You are the person she would naturally like to succeed her in anything she has to leave; and you take such a time about answering her letters, you seem to wish to vex her. You'll succeed at last—and, I can tell you, you can't afford to throw away friendship just now. I shall want every friend, I mean every real friend, I

can count upon. More than you think depends on this affair. If I'm returned for Shillingsworth, I'm quite certain I shall get something very soon—and if I once get it, depend upon it, I shall get on. Some people would say I'm a fool for my pains, but it is money very well spent—it is the only money, I really think, I ever laid out wisely in my life, and it is a very serious matter our succeeding in this. Did not your aunt Lorrimer say that she thought she would be at Golden Friars again this year?"

"Yes, I think so; why?" said mamma, listlessly.

"Because she must have some influence with that beast Rokestone—I often wonder what devil has got hold of my affairs, or how Rokestone happens to meet me at so many points—and if she would talk to him a little, she might prevent his doing me a very serious mischief. She is sure to see him when she goes down there."

"He's not there often, you know; I can always find a time to go to Golden Friars without a chance of seeing him. I shall never see him again, I hope." I thought mamma sighed a little, as she said this. "But I'll write and ask Lady Lorrimer to say whatever you wish to him, when her visit to Golden Friars is quite decided on."

So the conversation ended, and upon that theme was not resumed, at least within my hearing, during the remainder of our stay in town.

My journal, which I kept pretty punctually during that season, lies open on the table before me. I have been aiding my memory with it. It has, however, helped me to nothing that bears upon my story. It is a register, for the most part, of routine. Now we lunched with Lady This—now we went to the Duchess of So-and-so's garden-party—every night either a ball, or a musical party, or the opera. Sometimes I was asked out to dinner, sometimes we went to the

play. Ink and leaves are discoloured by time. The score years and more that have passed, have transformed this record of frivolity into a solemn and melancholy Mentor. So many of the names that figure there have since been carved on tombstones! Among those that live still, and hold their heads up, there is change everywhere—some for better, some for worse; and yet riven, shattered, scattered as this muster-roll is, with perfect continuity and solidity, that smiling Sadduceeic world without a home, the community that lives out of doors, and accepts, as it seems to me, satire and pleasure in lieu of the affections, lives and works on upon its old principles and aliment; diamonds do not fail, nor liveries, nor high-bred horses, nor pretty faces, nor witty men, nor chaperons, nor fools, nor rascals.

I must tell you, however, what does not distinctly appear in this diary. Among the many so-called admirers who asked for

dances in the ball-room, were two who appeared to like me with a deeper feeling than the others. One was handsome Colonel Saint-George Dacre, with an estate of thirty thousand a year, as my friends told mamma, who duly conveyed the fact to me. But young ladies, newly come out and very much danced with, are fastidious, and I was hard to please. My heart was not preoccupied, but even in my lonely life I had seen men who interested me more. I liked my present life and freedom too well, and shrank from the idea of being married. The other was Sir Henry Park, also rich, but older. Papa, I think, looked even higher for me, and fancied that I might possibly marry so as to make political connection for him. He did not, therefore, argue the question with me; but overrating me more than I did myself, thought he was quite safe in leaving me free to do as I pleased.

These gentlemen, therefore, were, with the most polite tenderness for their feelings,

dismissed—one at Brighton, in August; the other, a little later, at Carsbrook, where he chose to speak. I have mentioned these little affairs in the order in which they occurred, as I might have to allude to them in the pages that follow.

Everyone has, once or twice, in his or her life, I suppose, commenced a diary which was to have been prosecuted as diligently and perseveringly as that of Samuel Pepys. I did, I know, oftener than I could now tell you; I have just mentioned one of mine, and from this fragmentary note-book I give you the following extracts, which happen to help my narrative at this particular point.

"At length, thank Heaven! news of darling Laura Grey. I can hardly believe that I am to see her so soon. I wonder whether I shall be able, a year hence, to recall the delight of this expected moment. It is true, there is a great deal to qualify my happiness, for her language is ominous.

Still it will be delightful to meet her, and hear her adventures, and have one of our good long talks together, such as made Malory so happy.

"I was in mamma's room about half an hour ago; she was fidgeting about in her dressing-gown and slippers, and had just sat down before her dressing-table, when Wentworth (her maid) came in with letters by the early post. Mamma has as few secrets, I think, as most people, and her correspondence is generally very uninteresting. Whenever I care to read them, she allows me to amuse myself with her letters when she has opened and read them herself. I was in no mood to do so to-day; but I fancied I saw a slight but distinct change in her careless looks as she peeped into one. She read it a second time, and handed it to me. It is, indeed, from Laura Grey! It says that she is in great affliction, and that she will call at our town house 'to-morrow,' that is to-day, 'Thursday,' at one o'clock, to try whe-

ther mamma will consent to see her.

"'I think that very cool. I don't object to seeing her, however,' said mamma; 'but she shall know what I think of her.'

"I don't like the idea of such an opening as mamma would make. I must try to see Laura before she meets her. She must have wonders to tell me; it cannot have been a trifling thing that made her use me, apparently, so unkindly.

"Thursday—half-past one. No sign of Laura yet.

"Thursday—six o'clock. She has not appeared! What am I to think?

"Her letter is written, as it seems to me, in the hurry of agitation. I can't understand what all this means.

"Thursday night—eleven o'clock. Before going to bed. Laura has not appeared. No note. Mamma more vexed than I have often seen her. I fancy she had a hope of getting her back again, as I know I had.

"Friday. I waked in the dark, early

this morning, thinking of Laura, and fancying every horrible thing that could have befallen her since her note of yesterday morning was written.

"Went to mamma, who had her breakfast in her bed, and told her how miserable I was about Laura Grey. She said, 'There is nothing the matter with Miss Grey, except that she does not know how to behave herself.' I don't agree with mamma, and I am sure that she does not really think any such thing of Laura Grey. I am still very uneasy about her; there is no address to her note.

"I have just been again with mamma, to try whether she can recollect anything by which we could find her out. She says she can remember no circumstance by which we can trace her. Mamma says she had been trying to find a governess at some of the places where lists of ladies seeking such employment are kept, but without finding one

who exactly answered; papa had then seen an advertisement in the *Times*, which seemed to promise satisfactorily, and Miss Grey answered mamma's note, and referred to a lady, who immediately called on her; mamma could only recollect that she knew this lady's name, that she had heard of her before, and that she spoke with the greatest affection of Miss Grey, and shed tears while she lamented her determination to seek employment as a governess, instead of living at home with her. The lady had come in a carriage, with servants, and had all the appearance of being rich, and spoke of Laura as her cousin. But neither her name nor address could mamma recollect, and there remained no clue by which to trace her. It was some comfort to think that the lady who claimed her as a kinswoman, and spoke of her with so much affection, was wealthy, and anxious to take her to her own home; but circumstances are always mutable, and

life transitory—how can we tell where that lady is now?

"I have still one hope—Laura may have written one o'clock 'Thursday,' and meant Friday. It is only a chance—still I cling to it.

"Friday—three o'clock. Laura has not appeared. What are we to think? I can't get it out of my head that something very bad has happened. My poor Laura!

"Saturday night—a quarter to eleven. Going to bed. Another day, and no tidings of Laura. I have quite given up the hope of seeing her."

She did not come next day. On the subject on which mamma felt so sharply, she had not an opportunity of giving her a piece of her mind then, or the next day.

So, the season being over, behold us again in the country!

After our visit to Carsbrook, mamma and papa were going to Haitly Abbey. For some

reason, possibly the very simple one that I had been forgotten in the invitation, I was not to accompany them; I was despatched in charge of old Lady Hester Wigmore, who was going that way, to Chester, where Miss Pounden took me up; and with her, "to my great content," as old Samuel Pepys says, I went to Malory, which I always revisited with an unutterable affection, as my only true home.

Nothing happened during my stay at Malory, which was unexpectedly interrupted by a note from mamma appointing to meet me at Chester. Papa had been obliged to go to town to consult with some friends, and he was then to go down to Shillingsworth to speak at a public dinner. She and I were going northward. She would tell me all when we met. I need not bring any of my finery with me.

With this scanty information, and some curiosity as to our destination in the North, I arrived at Chester, and there met mamma,

from whom I soon learned that our excursion was to lead us into wild and beautiful scenery quite new to me.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE GEORGE AND DRAGON.

WE had to wait for a long time at some station, I forget its name. The sun set, and night overtook us before we reached the end of our journey by rail. We had then to drive about twelve miles. The road, for many miles, lay through a desolate black moss. I could not have believed there was anything so savage in England. A thin mist was stretched like a veil over the more distant level of the dark expanse, on which, here and there, a wide pool gleamed faintly under the moonlight. To the right there rose a grand mass of mountain. We were soon driving through a sort

of gorge, and found ourselves fenced in by the steep sides of gigantic mountains, as we followed a road that wound and ascended among them. I shall never forget the beautiful effect of the scene suddenly presented, and for the first time, as the road reached its highest elevation, and I saw, with the dark receding sides of the mountain we had been penetrating for a proscenium, my first view of Golden Friars. Oh! how beautiful!

Surrounded by an amphitheatre of Alpine fells, the broad mere of Golden Friars glimmered cold under the moonlight, and the quaint little town of steep gables, built of light grey stone, rose from its grassy margin surrounded by elms, single or in clumps, that looked almost black in contrast with the gleaming lake and the white masonry of the town. It looked like enchanted ground. A silvery hoar-frost seemed to cover the whole scene, giving it a filmy and half-visionary character that

enhanced its beauty. I was exclaiming in wonder and delight as every minute some new beauty unfolded itself to view. Mamma was silent, as she looked from the window; I saw that she cried gently, thinking herself unobserved. A beautiful scene, where childish days were passed, awakes so many sweet and bitter fancies! The yearnings for the irrevocable, the heartache of the memory, opened the fountains of her tears; and I was careful not to interrupt her lonely thoughts. I left her to the enjoyment of that melancholy luxury, and gazed on in strange delight.

Here, then, was the dwelling-place of that redoubted enemy of our house whom fate seemed to have ordained as our prosecutor. Here lived the old enchanter whose malign spells were woven about us, in busy London and quiet Malory, or the distant scenes of France and Italy. Even this thought added interest to the romantic scene.

We had now descended to the level of the

shore of the lake, along whose margin our road swept in a gentle curve. The fells from this level rose stupendous, all around, striking their silvery peaks into the misty moonlight, and looking so aërial that one might fancy a stone thrown would pass through their sides as if they were merely vapour. Now we passed under the shadow of the first clump of mighty elms; and now the white fronts and chimneys of the village houses rose in the near foreground. There was no sign of life but the barking of the watch-dogs, and the cackling of the vigilant geese, and the light that glanced from the hall of the "George and Dragon," the substantial old inn that, looking across the road, faces the lake and the distant fells. At the door of this ancient and comfortable inn drew up our chaise and four horses, no mere ostentation, but a simple necessity, where carriage and luggage were pulled, towards the close of so long a stage, over

the steeps where the road pushes its way high among the fells.

So our journey was over; and we stood in the hall. Before we went up to our rooms mamma inquired whether Lady Lorrimer had arrived. Yes, her ladyship had been there since the day before yesterday. Mamma seemed nervous and uncomfortable. She sent down her maid to find out whether Sir Harry Rokestone was in the country; and when the servant returned and told her that he was not expected to arrive at Dorracleugh before a fortnight, she sighed, and I heard her say faintly, "Thank God!"

I confess it was rather a disappointment than a relief to me. I rather wished to see this truculent old wizard. After a sound sleep, which we both needed, I got up and had a little peep at that beautiful place, in the early sunlight, before breakfast. Lady Lorrimer's maid came with inquiries from her mistress, for mamma and me. Her

ladyship was not very well, and could not see us till about twelve. She was so vexed at having to put us off, and hoped we were not tired; and also that we would take our dinner with her. To this mamma agreed.

I was curious to see Lady Lorrimer once more. My ideas had grown obscure, and my theory of that kinswoman had been disagreeably disturbed, ever since the evening on which she, or her double, had passed me by so resolutely in the street.

Having heard that she was quite ready to see us, we paid our visit. I wondered how she would receive me, and my suspense amounted almost to excitement as I reached the door. A moment more, and I could not believe that Lady Lorrimer and the woman who so resembled her were the same. Nothing could be more affectionate than Lady Lorrimer. She received us with a very real welcome, and so much pleasure in her looks, tones, and words. She was not, indeed, looking well, but her spirits seemed

cheerful. She embraced mamma, and kissed her very fondly; then she kissed me over and over again. I was utterly puzzled, and more than doubted the identity of this warm-hearted, affectionate woman with the person who had chosen to cut me with such offensive and sinister persistence.

"See how this pretty creature looks at me!" she said to mamma, laughing, as she detected my conscious scrutiny.

I blushed and looked down; I did not know what to say.

"I'm very much obliged to you, dear, for looking at me, so few people do now-a-days; and I was just going to steal a good look at you, when I found I was anticipated. I have just been saying to your mamma that I have ordered a boat, and we must all have a sail together on the lake after dinner; what do you say?"

Of course I was delighted; I thought the place perfectly charming.

"I lived the earlier part of my life here,"

she resumed, "and so did your mamma, you know—when she was a little girl, and until she came to be nineteen or twenty—I forget which you were, dear, when you were married?" she said, turning to mamma.

"Twenty-two," said mamma, smiling.

"Twenty-two? Really! Well, we lived at Mardykes. I'll point out the place on the water when we take our sail; you can't see it from these windows."

"And where does Sir Harry Rokestone live?" I asked.

"You can't see that either from these windows. It is further than Mardykes, at the same side. But we shall see it from the boat."

Then she and mamma began to talk, and I went to the window and looked out.

Lady Lorrimer, with all her airs of conventual seclusion, hungered and thirsted after gossip; and whenever they met, she learned all the stories from mamma, and

gave her, in return, old scandal and ridiculous anecdotes about the predecessors of the people with whose sayings, doings, and mishaps mamma amused her.

Two o'clock dinners, instead of luncheons, were the rule in this part of the world. And people turned tea into a very substantial supper, and were all in bed and asleep before the hour arrived at which the London ladies and gentlemen are beginning to dress for a ball.

You are now to suppose us, on a sunny evening, on board the boat that had been moored for some time at the jetty opposite the door of the "George and Dragon." We were standing up the lake, and away from the Golden Friars shore, towards a distant wood, which they told me was the forest of Clusted.

"Look at that forest, Ethel," said Lady Lorrimer. "It is the haunted forest of Clusted—the last resort of the fairies in England. It was there, they say, that Sir

Bale Mardykes, long ago, made a compact with the Evil One."

Through the openings of its magnificent trees, as we drew nearer, from time to time, the ivied ruins of an old manor-house were visible. In this beautiful and, in spite of the monotony of the gigantic fells that surround the lake, ever-varying scenery, my companions gradually grew silent for a time; even I felt the dreamy influence of the scene, and liked the listless silence, in which nothing was heard but the rush of the waters, and the flap of the sail now and then. I was living in a world of fancy: they in a sadder one of memory.

In a little while, in gentle tones, they were exchanging old remembrances; a few words now and then sufficed; the affecting associations of scenes of early life revisited were crowding up everywhere. As happens to some people when death is near, a change, that seemed to me quite beautiful, came over mamma's mind in the air and

lights of this beautiful place! How I wished that she could remain always as she was now!

With the old recollections seemed to return the simple rural spirit of the early life. What is the town life, of which I had tasted, compared with this? How much simpler, tenderer, sublimer, this is! How immensely nearer heaven! The breeze was light, and the signs of the sky assured the boatmen that we need fear none of those gusts and squalls that sometimes burst so furiously down through the cloughs and hollows of the surrounding mountains. I, with the nautical knowledge acquired at Malory, took the tiller, under direction of the boatmen. We had a good deal of tacking to get near enough to the shore at Clusted to command a good view of that fine piece of forest. We then sailed northward, along the margin of the "mere," as they call the lake; and, when we had gone in that direction for a mile or more, turned the boat's

head across the water, and ran before the breeze towards the Mardykes side. There is a small island near the other side, with a streak of grey rock and bushes nearly surrounding what looked like a ruined chapel or hermitage, and Lady Lorrimer told me to pass this as nearly as I could.

The glow of evening was by this time in the western sky. The sun was hidden behind the fells that form a noble barrier between Golden Friars and the distant moss of Dardale, where stands Haworth Hall. In deepest purple shadow the mountains here closely overhang the lake. Under these, along the margin, Lady Lorrimer told me to steer.

We were gliding slowly along, so that there was ample leisure to note every tree and rock upon the shore as we passed. As we drifted, rather than sailed, along the shore, there suddenly opened from the margin a narrow valley, reaching about a quarter of a mile. It was a sudden dip in the

mountains that here rise nearly from the edge of the lake. Steep-sided and wild was this hollow, and backed by a mountain that, to me, looking up from the level of the lake, appeared stupendous.

The valley lay flat in one unbroken field of short grass. A broad-fronted, feudal tower, with a few more modern buildings about it, stood far back, fronting the river. A rude stone pier afforded shelter to a couple of boats, and a double line of immense lime-trees receded from that point about half-way up to the tower. Whether it was altogether due to the peculiar conformation of the scene, or that it owed its character in large measure to its being enveloped in the deep purple shadow cast by the surrounding mountain, and the strange effect of the glow reflected downward from the evening clouds, which touched the summits of the trees, and the edges of the old tower, like the light of a distant conflagration, I cannot say; but never did I see

a spot with so awful a character of solitude and melancholy.

In the gloom we could see a man standing alone on the extremity of the stone pier, looking over the lake. This figure was the only living thing we could discover there.

"Well, dear, now you see it. That's Dorracleugh—that's Harry Rokestone's place," said Lady Lorrimer. "What a spot! Fit only for a bear or an anchorite. Do you know," she added, turning to mamma, "he is there a great deal more than he used to be, they tell me. I know if I were to live in that place for six months I should never come out of it a sane woman. To do him justice, he does not stay very long here when he does come, and for years he never came at all. He has other places, far away from this; and if a certain event had happened about two-and-twenty years ago," she added, for my behalf, "he intended building quite a regal house a little higher up, on a site that is really enchanting, but your

mamma would not allow him; and so, and so——" Lady Lorrimer had turned her glasses during her sentence upon the figure which stood motionless on the end of the pier; and she said, forgetting what she had been telling me, "I really think—I'm nearly certain—that man standing there is Harry Rokestone!"

Mamma started. I looked with all my eyes; little more than a hundred yards interposed, but the shadow was so intense, and the effect of the faint reflected light so odd and puzzling, that I could be certain of nothing, but that the man stood very erect, and was tall and powerfully built. Lady Lorrimer was too much absorbed in her inspection to offer me her glasses, which I was longing to borrow, but for which I could not well ask, and so we sailed slowly by, and the hill that flanked the valley gradually glided between us and the pier, and the figure disappeared from view. Lady Lorrimer, lowering her glasses, said:

"I can't say positively, but I'm very nearly certain it was he."

Mamma said nothing, but was looking pale, and during the rest of our sail seemed absent and uncomfortable, if not unhappy.

CHAPTER IX.

NOTICE TO QUIT.

WE drank tea with Lady Lorrimer. Mamma continued very silent, and I think she had been crying in her room.

"They can't tell me here whether Harry has arrived or not," said Lady Lorrimer. "He might have returned by the Dardale Road, and if so, he would not have passed through Golden Friars, so it is doubtful. But I'm pretty sure that was he."

"I wish I were sure of that," said mamma.

"Well, I don't know," said Lady Lorrimer, "what to advise. I was just going to say it might be a wise thing if you were to make up your mind to see him, and to beard the lion in his den."

"No," said mamma; "if you mean to meet him and speak to him, I could not do that. I shall never see him again—nothing but pain could come of it; and he would not see me, and he ought not to see me; and he ought not to forgive me—never!"

"Well, dear, I can't deny it, you did use him very ill. And he is, and always was, a fierce and implacable enemy," answered Lady Lorrimer. "I fancied, perhaps, if he did see you, the old chord might be touched again, and yield something of its old tone on an ear saddened by time. But I daresay you are right. It was a Quixotic inspiration, and might have led to disaster; more probably, indeed, than to victory."

"I am quite sure of that—in fact, I know it," said mamma.

And there followed a silence.

"I sometimes think, Mabel—I was thinking so all this evening," said Lady Lorrimer, "it might have been happier for us if we had never left this lonely place. We might have

been happier if we had been born under harder conditions; the power of doing what pleases us best leads us so often into sorrow."

Another silence followed. Mamma was looking over her shoulder, sadly, through the window at the familiar view of lake and mountain, indolently listening.

"I regret it, and I don't regret it," continued Lady Lorrimer. "If I could go back again into my early self—I wish I could—but the artificial life so perverts and enervates one, I hardly know, honestly, what I wish. I only know there is regret enough to make me discontented, and I think I should have been a great deal happier if I had been compelled to stay at Golden Friars, and had never passed beyond the mountains that surround us here. I have not so long as you to live, Mabel, and I'm glad of it. I am not quite so much of a Sadducee as you used to think me, and I hope there may be a happier world for us

all. And, now that I have ended my hom-miny, as they call such long speeches in this country, will you, dear Ethel, give me a cup of tea?"

Lady Lorrimer and I talked. I was curious about some of the places and ruins I had seen, and asked questions, which it seemed to delight her to answer. It is a region abounding in stories strange and marvellous, family traditions, and legends of every kind.

"I think," said mamma, *à propos des bottes*, "if he has returned they are sure to know in the town before ten to-night. Would you mind asking again by-and-by?"

"You mean about Harry Rokestone?"

"Yes."

"I will. I'll make out all about him. We saw his castle to-day," she continued, turning to me. "Our not knowing whether he was there or not made it a very interesting contemplation. You remember the short speech Sheridan wrote to introduce Kelly's

song at Drury Lane—'There stands my Matilda's cottage! She must be in it, or else out of it'?"

Again mamma dropped out, and the conversation was maintained by Lady Lorrimer and myself. In a little while mamma took her leave, complaining of a headache; and our kinswoman begged that I would remain for an hour or so, to keep her company. When mamma had bid her good night, and was gone, the door being shut, Lady Lorrimer laughed, and said:

"Now, tell me truly, don't you think if your papa had been with us to-day in the boat, and seen the change that took place in your mamma's looks and spirits from the moment she saw Dorracleugh, and the tall man who stood on the rock, down to the hour of her headache and early good night, he would have been a little jealous?"

I did not quite know whether she was joking or serious, and I fancy there was some puzzle in my face as I answered,

"But it can't be that she liked Sir Harry Rokestone; she is awfully afraid of him—that is the reason, I'm sure, she was so put out. She never liked him."

"Don't be too sure of that, little woman," she answered, gaily.

"Do you really think mamma liked him? Why, she was in love with papa."

"No, it was nothing so deep," said Lady Lorrimer; "she did not love your papa. It was a violent whim, and if she had been left just five weeks to think, she would have returned to Rokestone."

"But there can be no sentiment remaining still," I remarked. "Sir Harry Rokestone is an old man!"

"Yes, he is an old man; he is—let me see—he's fifty-six. And she did choose to marry your papa. But I'm sure she thinks she made a great mistake. I am very sure she thinks that, with all his faults, Rokestone was the more loveable man, the better man, the truer. He would have taken good

care of her. I don't know any one point in which he was your papa's inferior, and there are fifty in which he was immeasurably his superior. He was a handsomer man, if that is worth anything. I think I never saw so handsome a man, in his peculiar style. You think me a very odd old woman to tell you my opinion of your father so frankly; but I am speaking as your mamma's friend and kinswoman, and I say your papa has not used her well. He is good-humoured, and has good spirits, and he has some good-nature, quite subordinated to his selfishness. And those qualities, so far as I know, complete the muster-roll of his virtues. But he has made her, in no respect, a good husband. In some a very bad one. And he employs half-a-dozen attorneys, to whom he commits his business at random; and he is too indolent to look after anything. Of course he's robbed, and everything at sixes and sevens; and he has got your mamma to take legal steps to make

away with her money for his own purposes; and the foolish child, the merest simpleton in money matters, does everything he bids her; and I really believe she has left herself without a guinea. I don't like him—no one could who likes *her*. Poor, dear Mabel, she wants energy; I never knew a woman with so little will. She never showed any but once, and that was when she did a foolish thing, and married your father."

"And did Sir Harry Rokestone like mamma very much?" I asked.

"He was madly in love with her, and when she married your papa, he wanted to shoot him. I think he was, without any metaphor, very nearly out of his mind. He has been a sort of anchorite ever since. His money is of no use to him. He is a bitter and eccentric old man."

"And he can injure papa now?"

"So I'm told. Your papa thinks so; and he seldom takes the trouble to be alarmed about danger three or four months distant."

Then, to my disappointment and, also, my relief, that subject dropped. It had interested and pained me; and sometimes I felt that it was scarcely right that I should hear all she was saying, without taking up the cudgels for papa. Now, with great animation, she told me her recollections of her girlish days here at Golden Friars, when the old gentry were such bores and humorists as are no longer to be met with anywhere. And as she made me laugh at these recitals, her maid, whom she had sent down to "the bar" to make an inquiry, returned, and told her something in an undertone. As soon as she was gone, Lady Lorrimer said,

"Yes, it is quite true. Tell your mamma that Harry Rokestone is at Dorracleugh."

She became thoughtful. Perhaps she was rehearsing mentally the mediatory conference she had undertaken.

We had not much more conversation that night; and we soon parted with a very affectionate good-night. My room adjoined

mamma's, and finding that she was not yet asleep, I went in and gave her Lady Lorrimer's message. Mamma changed colour, and raised herself suddenly on her elbow, looking in my face.

"Very well, dear," said she, a little flurried. "We must leave this to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER X.

SIR HARRY'S ANSWER.

ABOUT eleven o'clock next morning our chaise was at the door of the "George and Dragon." We had been waiting with our bonnets on to say good-bye to Lady Lorrimer. I have seen two or three places in my life to which my affections were drawn at first sight, and this was one of them. I was standing at the window, looking my last at this beautiful scene. Mamma was restless and impatient. I knew she was uneasy lest some accident should bring Sir Harry Rokestone to the door before we had set out upon our journey.

At length Lady Lorrimer's foreign maid came to tell us that milady wished to see us

now. Accordingly we followed the maid, who softly announced us.

The room was darkened; only one gleam, through a little opening in the far shutter, touched the curtains of her bed, showing the old-fashioned chintz pattern, like a transparency, through the faded lining. She was no longer the gay Lady Lorrimer of the evening before. She was sitting up among her pillows, nearly in the dark, and the most melancholy, whimpering voice you can imagine came through the gloom from among the curtains.

"Is my sweet Ethel there, also?" she asked when she had kissed mamma. "Oh, that's right; I should not have been happy if I had not bid you good-bye. Give me your hand, darling. And so you are going, Mabel? I'm sorry you go so soon, but perhaps you are right—I think you are. It would not do, perhaps, to meet. I'll do what I can, and write to tell you how I succeed."

Mamma thanked and kissed her again.

"I'm not so well as people think, dear, nor as I wish to think myself. We may not meet for a long time, and I wish to tell you, Mabel—I wish to tell you both—that I won't leave you dependent on that reckless creature, Francis Ware. I want you two to be safe. I have none but you left me to love on earth." Here poor Lady Lorrimer began to cry. "Whenever I write to you, you must come to me; don't let anything prevent you. I'm so weak. I want to leave you both very well, and I intend to put it out of my power to change it—who's that at the door? Just open it, Ethel, dear child, and see if anyone is there—my maid, I mean—you can say you dropped your handkerchief—hush!"

There was no one in the lobby.

"Shut it quietly, dear; I'll do what I say—don't thank me—don't say a word about it to anyone, and if you mention it to Francis Ware, charge him to tell no one

else. There, dears, both, don't stay longer. God bless you! Go, go; God bless you!"

And with these words, having kissed us both very fondly, she dismissed us.

Mamma ran down, and out to the carriage very quickly, and sat back as far as she could at the far side. I followed, and all being ready, in a minute more we were driving swiftly from the "George and Dragon," and soon town, lake, forest, and distant fells were hidden from view by the precipitous sides of the savage gorge, through which the road winds its upward way.

Our drive into Golden Friars had been a silent one, and so was our drive from it, though from different causes. I was thinking over our odd interview with poor Lady Lorrimer. In what a low, nervous state she seemed, and how affectionately she spoke! I had no inquisitive tendencies, and I was just at the age when people take the future for granted. No sordid speculations

therefore, I can honestly say, were busy with my brain.

We were to have stayed at least ten days at Golden Friars, and here we were flying from it before two days were spent. All our plans were upset by the blight of Sir Harry Rokestone's arrival at least a fortnight before the date of his usual visit, just as Napoleon's Russian calculations were spoilt by the famous early Winter of 1812. I was vexed in my way. I should not have been sorry to hear that he had been well ducked in the lake. Mamma was vexed in her own way, also, when, about an hour after, she escaped from the thoughts that agitated her at first, and descended to her ordinary level. A gap of more than a week was made in her series of visits. What was to be done with it?

"Where are we going, mamma?" I asked, innocently enough.

"Nowhere—everywhere. To Chester," she answered, presently.

"And where then?" I asked.

"Why do you ask questions that I can't answer? Why should you like to make me more miserable than I am? Everything is thrown into confusion. I'm sure I don't know the least. I have no plans. I literally don't know where we are to lay our heads to-night. There's no one to take care of us. As usual, whenever I want assistance, there's none to be had, and my maid is so utterly helpless, and your papa in town. I only know that I'm not strong enough for this kind of thing; you can write to your papa when we come to Chester. We shan't see him for Heaven knows how long—he may have left London by this time; and he'll write to Golden Friars—and now that I think of it—oh! how am I to live through all this!—I forgot to tell the people there where to send our letters. Oh! dear, oh! dear, it is such a muddle! And I could not have told them, literally, for I don't know where we are going. We had

better just stay at Chester till he comes, whenever that may be; and I really could just lie down and cry."

I was glad we were to ourselves, for mamma's looks and tones were so utterly despairing that in a railway carriage we should have made quite an excitement. In such matters mamma was very easy to persuade by anyone who would take the trouble of thinking on himself, and she consented to come to Malory instead; and there, accordingly, we arrived next day, much to the surprise of Rebecca Torkill, who received us with a very glad welcome, solemnized a little by a housekeeper's responsibilities.

Mamma enjoyed her simple life here wonderfully—more, a great deal, than I had ventured to hope. She seemed to me naturally made for a rural life, though fate had consigned her to a town one. She reminded me of the German prince mentioned in Tom Moore's journal, who had a

great taste for navigation, but whose principality unfortunately was inland.

Papa did not arrive until the day before that fixed for his and mamma's visit to Dromelton. He was in high spirits, everything was going well; his canvass was prospering, and now Lady Lorrimer's conversation at parting, as reported by mamma, lighted up the uncertain future with a steady glory, and set his sanguine spirit in a blaze. Attorneys, foreclosures, bills of exchange hovering threateningly in the air, and biding their brief time to pounce upon him, all lost their horrors, for a little, in the exhilarating news.

Mamma had been expecting a letter from Lady Lorrimer—one, at length, arrived this evening. Papa had walked round by the mill-road to visit old Captain Etheridge. Mamma and I were in the drawing-room as she read it. It was a long one. She looked gloomy, and said, when she had come to the end,

"I was right—it was not worth trying. I'm afraid this will vex your papa. You may read it. You heard Aunt Lorrimer talk about it. Yes, I was right. She was a great deal too sanguine."

I read as follows:—

"My dearest Mabel,—I have a disagreeable letter to write. You desired me to relate with rigour every savage thing he said—I mean Harry Rokestone, of course—and I must keep my promise, although I think you will hate me for it. I had almost given him up, and thinking that for some reason he was resolved to forget his usual visit to me, and I being equally determined to make him see me, was this morning thinking of writing him a little cousinly note, to say that I was going to see him in his melancholy castle. But to-day, at about one, there came on one of those fine thunder-storms among the fells that you used to admire so much. It grew awfully dark—

portentous omen!—and some enormous drops of rain, as big as bullets, came smacking down upon the window-stone. Perhaps these drove him in; for in he came, announced by the waiter, exactly as a very much nearer clap of thunder startled all the echoes of Golden Friars into a hundred reverberations; a finer heralding, and much more characteristic of the scene and man than that flourish of trumpets to which kings always enter in Shakespeare. In he came, my dear Mabel, looking so king-like, and as tall as the Catstean on Dardale Moss, and gloomy as the sky. He is as like Allan Macaulay, in the 'Legend of Montrose,' as ever. A huge dog, one of that grand sort you remember long ago at Dorracleugh, came striding in beside him. He used to smile long ago. But it is many years, you know, since fortune killed that smile; and he took my poor thin fingers in his colossal hand, with what Clarendon calls a 'glooming' countenance. We talked for some time

as well as the thunder and the clatter of the rain, mixed with hail, would let us.

"By the time its violence was a little abated, I, being, as you know, not a bad diplomatist, managed, without startling him, to bring him face to face with the subject on which I wished to move him. I may as well tell you at once, my dear Mabel, I might just as well (to return to my old simile) have tried to move the Catstean. When I described the danger in which the proceedings would involve you, as well as your husband, he suddenly smiled; it was his first smile, so far as I remember, for many a day. It was not pleasant sunlight—it was more like the glare of the lightning.

"'We have not very far to travel in life's journey,' I said, 'you and I. We have had our enemies and our quarrels, and fought our battles stoutly enough. It is time we should forget and forgive.'

"'I have forgotten a great deal,' he answered. 'I'll forgive nothing.'

"'You can't mean you have forgotten pretty Mabel?' I exclaimed.

"'Let me bury my dead out of my sight,' was all he said. He did not say it kindly. It was spoken sulkily and peremptorily.

"'Well, Harry,' I said, returning upon his former speech, 'I can't suppose you really intend to forgive nothing.'

"'It is a hypocritical world,' he answered. 'If it were anything else, everyone would confess what everyone knows, that no one ever forgave anyone anything since man was created.'

"'Am I, then, to assume that you will prosecute this matter, to their ruin, through revenge?' I asked, rather harshly.

"'Certainly not,' said he. 'That feud is dead and rotten. It is twenty years and more since I saw them. I'm tired of their names. The man I sometimes remember—I'd like to see him flung over the crags of Darness Heugh—but the girl I never think of—she's clean forgot. To me they are

total strangers. I'm a trustee in this matter; why should I swerve from my duty, and incur, perhaps, a danger for those whom I know not?'

"'You are not obliged to do this—you know you are not,' I urged. 'You have the power, that's all, and you choose to exercise it.'

"'Amen, so be it; and now we've said enough,' he replied.

"'No,' I answered, warmly, for it was impossible to be diplomatic with a man like this. 'I must say a word more. I ask you only to treat them as you describe them, that is as strangers. You would not put yourself out of your way to crush a stranger. There was a time when you were kind.'

"'And foolish,' said he.

"'Kind,' I repeated; 'you were a kind man.'

"'The volume of life is full of knowledge,' he answered, 'and I have turned over some pages since then.'

"'A higher knowledge leads us to charity,' I pleaded.

"'The highest to justice,' he said, with a scoff. 'I'm no theologian, but I know that fellow deserves the very worst. He refused to meet me, when a crack or two of a pistol might have blown away our feud, since so you call it—feud with such a mafflin!' Every now and then, when he is excited, out pops one of these strange words. They came very often in this conversation, but I don't remember them. 'The mafflin! the coward!'

"I give you his words; his truculent looks I can't give you. It is plain he has not forgiven him, and never will. Your husband, we all know, did perfectly right in declining that wild challenge. All his friends so advised him. I was very near saying a foolish thing about you, but I saw it in time, and turned my sentence differently; and when I had done, he said:

"'I am going now—the shower is over.'

He took my hand, and said, 'Good-bye.' But he held it still, and looking me in the face with his gloomy eyes, he added: 'See, I like you well; but if you will talk of those people, or so much as mention their names again, we meet as friends no more.'

"'Think better of it, do, Harry,' I called after him, but he was already clanking over the lobby in his cyclopean shoes. Whether he heard me or not, he walked down the stairs, with his big brute at his heels, without once looking over his shoulder.

"And now, dear Mabel, I have told you everything. You are, of course, to take for granted those Northumbrian words and idioms which drop from him, as I reminded you, as he grows warm in discussion. This is a 'report' rather than a letter, and I have sat up very late to finish it, and I send it to the post-office before I go to bed. Good night, and Heaven bless you, and I hope this gloomy letter may not vex you as much as its purport does me; disappoint you,

judging from what you said to me when we talked the matter over, I scarcely think it can."

There is a Latin proverb, almost the only four words of Latin I possess, which says, *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*, for which, and for its translation, I am obliged to Mr. Carmel: "The unknown is taken for the sublime." I did not at the time at all understand the nature of the danger that threatened, and its vagueness magnified it. Papa came in. He read the letter, and the deeper he got in it the paler his face grew, and the more it darkened. He drew a great breath as he laid it down.

"Well, it's not worse than you expected?" said mamma at last. "I hope not. I've had so much to weary, and worry, and break me down; you have no idea what the journey to the Golden Friars was to me. I have not been at all myself. I've been trying to do too much. Ethel there will tell

you all I said to my aunt; and really things go so wrong and so unluckily, no matter what one does, that I almost think I'll go to my bed and cry."

"Yes, dear," said papa, thinking, a little bewildered. "It's—it's—it is—it's very perverse. The old scoundrel! I suppose this is something else."

He took up a letter that had followed him by the same post, and nervously broke the seal. I was watching his face intently as he read. It brightened.

"Here—here's a bit of good luck at last! Where's Mabel? Oh, yes! it's from Cloudesly. There are some leases just expired at Ellenston, and we shall get at least two thousand pounds, he thinks, for renewing. That makes it all right for the present. I wish it had been fifteen hundred more; but it's a great deal better than nothing. We'll tide it over, you'll find." And papa kissed her with effusion.

"And you can give three hundred pounds

to Le Panier and Tarlton; they have been sending so often lately," said mamma, recovering from her despondency.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY MARDYKES'S BALL.

THE Autumn deepened, and leaves were brown, and Summer's leafy honours spread drifting over the short grass and the forest roots. Winter came, and snow was on the ground, and presently Spring began to show its buds, and blades, and earliest flowers; and the London season was again upon us.

Lady Lorrimer had gone, soon after our visit to Golden Friars, to Naples for the Winter. She was to pass the Summer in Switzerland, and the Autumn somewhere in the north of Italy, and again she was to winter in her old quarters at Naples. We

had little chance, therefore, of seeing her again in England for more than a year. Her letters were written in varying spirits, sometimes cheery, sometimes *de profundis.* Sometimes she seemed to think that she was just going to break up and sink; and then her next letter would unfold plans looking far into the future, and talking of her next visit to England. There was an uneasy and even violent fluctuation in these accounts, which did not exactly suggest the idea of a merely fanciful invalid. She spoke at times, also, of intense and exhausting pain. And she mentioned that in Paris she had been in the surgeons' hands, and that there was still uncertainty as to what good they might have done her. This may have been at the root of her hysterical vacillations. But, in addition to this, there was something very odd in Lady Lorrimer's correspondence. She had told mamma to write to her once a fortnight, and promised to answer punctually; but nothing could be more irregular. At

one time, so long an interval as two whole months passed without bringing a line from her. Then, again, she would complain of mamma's want of punctuality. She seemed to have forgotten things that mamma had told her; and sometimes she alluded to things as if she had told them to mamma, which she had never mentioned before. Either the post-office was playing tricks with her letters, or poor Lady Lorrimer was losing her head.

I think, if we had been in a quiet place like Malory, we should have been more uneasy about Lady Lorrimer than, in the whirl of London, we had time to be. There was one odd passage in one of her letters; it was as follows: "Send your letters, not by the post, I move about so much; but, when you have an opportunity, send them by a friend. I wish I were happier. I don't do always as I like. If we were for a time together—but all I do is so uncertain!"

Papa heard more than her letters told of her state of health. A friend of his, who happened to be in Paris at the time, told papa that one of the medical celebrities whom she had consulted there had spoken to him in the most desponding terms of poor Lady Lorrimer's chances of recovery. I do not know whether it was referable to that account of her state of health or simply to the approach of the time when he was to make his *début* in the House; but the fact is that papa gave a great many dinner-parties this season; and mamma took her drives in a new carriage, with a new and very pretty pair of horses; and a great deal of new plate came home; and it was plain that he was making a fresh start in a style suited to his new position, which he assumed to be certain and near. He was playing rather deep upon this throw. It must be allowed, however, that nothing could look more promising.

Sir Luke Pyneweck, a young man, with

an estate and an overpowering influence in the town of Shillingsworth, had sat for the last three years for that borough, not in the House, but in his carriage, or a Bath-chair, in various watering-places at home and abroad—being, in fact, a miserable invalid. This influential young politician had written a confidential letter, with only two or three slips in spelling and grammar, to his friend the Patronage Secretary, telling him to look out for a man to represent Shillingsworth till he had recovered his health, which was not returning quite so quickly as he expected, and promising his strenuous support to the nominee of the minister. Papa's confidence, therefore, was very reasonably justified, and the matter was looked upon by those sages of the lobbies who count the shadowy noses of unborn Houses of Commons as settled. It was known that the dissolution would take place early in the Autumn.

Presently there came a letter to the "whip," from his friend Sir Luke Pyneweck,

announcing that he was so much better that he had made up his mind to try once more before retiring.

This was a stunning blow to papa. Sir Luke could do without the government better than the government could do without him. And do or say what they might, no one could carry the borough against him. The Patronage Secretary really liked my father; and, I believe, would have wished him, for many reasons, in the House. But what was to be done? Sir Luke was neither to be managed nor bullied; he was cunning and obstinate. He did not want anything for himself, and did not want anything for any other person. With a patriot of that type who could do anything?

It was a pity the "whip" did not know this before every safe constituency was engaged. A pity papa did not know it before he put an organ into Shillingsworth church, and subscribed six hundred pounds towards the building of the meeting-house. I never

saw papa so cast down and excited as he was by this disappointment. Looking very ill, however, he contrived to rally his spirits when he was among his friends, and seemed resolved, one way or other, to conquer fortune.

Balls, dinners, concerts, garden-parties, nevertheless, devoured our time, and our drives, and shopping, and visits went on, as if nothing had happened, and nothing was impending.

Two notable engagements for the next week, because they were connected, in the event, with my strange story, I mention now. On Tuesday there was Lady Mardykes's ball, and on that day week papa had a political party to dinner, among whom were some very considerable names indeed. Lady Mardykes's balls were always, as you know, among the most brilliant of the season. While dancing one of those quadrilles that give us breathing time between the round dances, I saw a face that riveted my

attention, and excited my curiosity. A slight old gentleman, in evening costume, with one of those obsolete under-waistcoats, which seemed to me such a pretty fashion (his was of blue satin), was the person I mean. A forbidding-looking man was this, with a thin face, as brown as a nut, hawk's eyes and beak, thin lips, and a certain character of dignified ill-temper, and even insolence, which, however, did not prevent its being a very gentleman-like face. I instantly recognised him as the old man, in the chocolate-coloured coat, who had talked so sharply, as it seemed to me and poor Nelly, with Laura Grey, on the Milk-walk, in the shadow of the steep bank and the overhanging trees.

"Who is that old gentleman standing near the door at the end of the room, with that blue satin about his neck? Now he's speaking to Lady Westerbroke."

"Oh! that's Lord Rillingdon," answered my friend.

"He does not go to many places? I have seen him, I think, but once before," I said.

"No, I fancy he does not care about this kind of thing."

"Doesn't he speak very well? I think I've heard——"

"Yes, he speaks only in Indian debates. He's very well up on India—he was there, you know."

"Don't you think he looks very cross?" I said.

"They say he is very cross," said my informant, laughing: and here the dance was resumed, and I heard no more of him.

Old Lord Rillingdon had his eyes about him. He seemed, as much as possible, to avoid talking to people, and I thought was looking very busily for somebody. As I now and then saw this old man, who, from time to time, changed his point of observation, my thoughts were busy with Laura

Grey, and the pain of my uncertainty returned—pain mingled with remorse. My enjoyment of this scene contrasted with her possible lot, upbraided me, and for a time I wished myself at home.

A little later I thought I saw a face that had not been seen in London for more than a year. I was not quite sure, but I thought I saw Monsieur Droqville. In rooms so crowded, one sometimes has so momentary a peep of a distant face that recognition is uncertain. Very soon I saw him again, and this time I had no doubt whatever. He seemed as usual, chatty, and full of energy; but I soon saw, or at least fancied, that he did not choose to see mamma or me. It is just possible I may have been doing him wrong. I did not see him, it is true, so much as once glance towards us; but Doctor or Monsieur Droqville was a man who saw everything, as Rebecca Torkill would say, with half an eye—always noting everything that passed; full of curiosity, suspicion,

and conclusion, and with an eye quick and piercing as a falcon's.

This man, I thought, had seen, and was avoiding us, without wishing to appear to do so. It so happened, however, that some time later, in the tea-room, mamma was placed beside him. I was near enough to hear. Mamma recognised him with a smile and a little bow. He replied with just surprise enough in his looks and tones to imply that he had not known, up to that moment, that she was there.

"You are surprised to see me here?" he said; "I can scarcely believe it myself. I've been away thirteen months—a wanderer all over Europe; and I shall be off again in a few days. By-the-by, you hear from Lady Lorrimer sometimes: I saw her at Naples, in January. She was looking flourishing then, but complaining a good deal. She has not been so well since—but I'll look in upon you to-morrow or the next day. I shall be sure to see her again, immediately. Your

friends, the Wiclyffs, were at Baden this summer, so were the D'Acres. Lord Charles is to marry that French lady; it turns out she's rather an heiress; it is very nearly arranged, and they seemed all very well pleased. Have you seen my friend Carmel lately?"

"About three weeks ago; he was going to North Wales," she said.

"He is another of those interesting people who are always dying, and never die," said Monsieur Droqville.

I felt a growing disgust for this unfeeling man. He talked a little longer, and then turned to me and said:

"There's one advantage, Miss Ware, in being an old fellow—one can tell a young lady, in such charming and brilliant looks as yours to-night, what he thinks, just as he might give his opinion upon a picture. But I won't venture mine; I'll content myself with making a petition. I only ask that,

when you are a very great lady, you'll remember a threadbare doctor, who would be very glad of an humble post about the court, and who is tired of wandering over the world in search of happiness, and finding a fee only once in fifty miles."

I do not know what was in this man's mind at that moment. If he was a Jesuit, he certainly owed very little to those arts and graces of which rumour allows so large a share to the order. But brusque and almost offensive as I thought him, there was something about him that seemed to command acceptance, and carry him everywhere he chose to go. He went away, and I saw him afterwards talking now to one great lady, now to another. Lord Rillingdon, who looked like the envious witch whom Madame D'Aulnois introduces sometimes at the feasts of her happy kings and queens, throwing a malign gloom on all about them, had vanished.

That night, however, was to recall, as unexpectedly, another face, a more startling reminder of Malory and Laura Grey.

CHAPTER XII.

NEWS OF LADY LORRIMER.

OLD Lord Verney, of all persons in the world, took a fancy to take me down to the tea-room. I think he believed, as other wiser people did, that papa, who was certainly clever, and a very shrewd club-house politician, might come to be somebody in the House, in time.

As usual, he was telling an interminable story, without point or beginning or end, about himself, and all mixed up with the minister, and the opposition leader, and an amendment, and some dismal bill, that I instantly lost my way in. As we entered the tea-room, a large room opening from

the landing, he nodded, without interrupting his story, to a gentleman who was going down-stairs. My eye followed this recognition, and I saw a tall, rather good-looking young man. I saw him only for a moment. I was so startled that I involuntarily almost stopped Lord Verney as we passed; but I recovered myself instantly. It was tantalising. He always talks as if he were making a speech; one can't, without rudeness, edge in a word; he is so pompous, I dare not interrupt him. He did that office for himself, however, by taking an ice; and I seized the transitory silence, and instantly asked him the name of the gentleman to whom he had bowed; I thought he said, "Mr. Jennings," and as a clever artist of that odd name had lately painted a portrait of Lord Verney, I was satisfied that I had heard him aright.

This was to be a night of odd recognitions. I was engaged to Lord John Roxford, who came up, and saying, "I think this is our

dance, Miss Ware?" took me away, to my great relief, from Lord Verney. Well, we danced and talked a little; and I learned nothing that I remember, except that he was to return to Paris the next day. Before he took me to mamma, however, he said:

"A very dear friend has asked me, as the greatest favour I can do him, to introduce him to you, Miss Ware; you will allow me?"

He repeated, I thought—for he was looking for him, and his face at that moment was turned a little away, and the noise considerable—the same name that Lord Verney had mentioned. As Rebecca Torkill used to say, "my heart jumped into my mouth," as I consented. A moment more, and I found myself actually acquainted with the very man! How strange it seemed! Was that smiling young man of fashion the same I had seen stretched on the rugged peat and roots at Plas Ylwd, with white face and leaden lips, and shirt soaked in blood? He

was, with his white-gloved hand on the pier-table beside me, inquiring what dance I could give him. I was engaged for this; but I could not risk the chance of forfeiting my talk with my new acquaintance. I gave it to him, and having the next at my disposal, transferred it to the injured man whom I had ousted.

The squabble, the innocent surprise, the regrets, the other hypocrisies, and finally the compromise over, away we went to take our places in the quadrille. I was glad it was not a round dance. I wanted to hear him talk a little. How strange it seemed to me, standing beside him in this artificial atmosphere of wax-light and music! Each affecting the air of an acquaintance made then and there; each perfectly recognising the other, as we stood side by side talking of the new primo tenore, the play, the Aztecs, and I know not what besides!

This young man's manner was different from what I had been accustomed to in

ball-rooms. There was none of the trifling, and no sign of the admiration which the conversation and looks of others seemed to imply. His tone, perfectly gentleman-like, was merely friendly, and he seemed to take an interest in me, much as I fancied an unknown relation might. We talked of things of no particular interest, until he happened to ask me something of my occasional wanderings in the country. It was my opportunity, and I seized it like a general.

"I like the country," I said. "I enjoy it thoroughly; I've lived nearly all my life in the country, in a place I am so fond of, called Malory. I think all about there so beautiful! It is close to Cardyllion—have you ever seen Cardyllion?"

"Yes, I've been to Cardyllion once—only once, I think. I did not see a great deal of it. But you, now, see a great deal more of the country—you have been to the lakes?"

"Oh! yes; but I want to ask how you

liked Cardyllion. How long is it since you were there?"

"About two years, or a little more, perhaps," he answered.

"Oh! that's just about the time the *Conway Castle* was wrecked—how awful that was! I had a companion then, my dearest friend—Laura Grey was her name; she left us so suddenly, when I was away from Malory, and I have never seen her since. I have been longing so to meet anyone who could tell me anything about her. You don't happen to know anyone, do you, who knows a young lady of that name? I make it a rule to ask everyone I can; and I'm sure I shall make her out at last."

"Nothing like perseverance," said he. "I shall be most happy to be enlisted; and if I should light upon a lady of that name, I may tell her that Miss Ware is very well, and happy?"

"No, not happy—at least, not quite happy, until she writes to tell me where she is, or

comes to see me; and tell her I could not have believed she would have been so unkind."

Conversations are as suddenly cut short in ball-rooms as they are in a beleaguered city, where the head of one of the interlocutors is carried off by a round-shot. Our dialogue ended with the sudden arrival of the ill-used man, whom I could no longer postpone, and who carried me off, very much vexed, as you may suppose, and scarcely giving my companion time to make his bow.

Never was "fast dance" so slow as this! At length it was over, and wherever I went my eyes wandered hither and thither in search of the tall young man with whom I had danced. The man who had figured in a scene which had so often returned to my imagination was now gone; I saw him neither in the dancing-rooms nor in any others. By this time there was a constant double current to and from the supper-room, up and down the stairs. As I went down, im-

mediately before me was Monsieur Droqville. He did not follow the stream, but passed into the hall.

Monsieur Droqville put on his loose black wrapper, and wound a shawl about his throat, and glanced, from habit, with his shrewd, hard eyes at the servants as he passed through them in the hall. He jumped into a cab, told the driver where to stop, lighted a cigar, and smoked.

He got out at the corner of a fashionable but rather dingy street not very far away. Then he dismissed his vehicle, walked up the pavement smoking, passed into a still quieter street, also fashionable, that opens from it at an obtuse angle. Here he walked slowly, and, as it were, softly. The faint echo of his own steps was the only sound that met him as he entered it. He crossed, threw his head back, and shrewdly scanned the upper windows, blowing out a thin stream of tobacco-smoke as he looked.

"Not flown yet, *animula, vagula, blandula?* Still on the perch," he said, as he crossed the street again.

His cigar was just out, and he threw it away as he reached the steps. He did not need to knock or ring; he admitted himself with a latch-key. A bedroom candlestick in the hall had a candle still burning in it. He took it and walked quietly up. The boards of the stairs and lobbies were bare, and a little dust lay on the wall and banister, indicating the neglected state of a house abandoned by its tenants for a journey or a very long stay in the country. He opened the back drawing-room door and put his head in. A pair of candles lighted the room. A thin elderly lady, in an odd costume, was the only person there. She wore a white, quilted headcloth, a black robe, and her beads and cross were at her side. She was reading, with spectacles on, a small book which she held open in both hands, as he peeped in. With a slight start she rose.

There was a little crucifix on the table, and a coloured print of the Madonna hung on the wall, on the nail from which a Watteau had been temporarily removed.

"Has your patient been anointed yet?" said Monsieur Droqville, in his short nasal tones.

"Not yet, reverend father," she answered. They were both speaking French.

"Has she been since nearly *in articulo?*"

"At about eleven o'clock, reverend father, her soul seemed at her very lips."

"In this complaint so it will often be. Is Sister Cecilia upstairs?"

"Yes, reverend father."

"Father Edwyn here?"

"Yes, reverend father."

He withdrew his head, closed the door, and walked upstairs. He tapped gently at the door of the front bedroom.

A French nun, in a habit precisely similar to that of the lady downstairs, stood noiselessly at the door. She was comparatively

young, wore no spectacles, and had a kind and rather sad countenance. He whispered a word to her, heard her answer softly, and then he entered the room with a soundless step—it was thickly carpeted, and furnished luxuriously—and stood at the side of a huge four-post bed, with stately curtains of silk, within which a miserable shrunken old woman, with a face brown as clay, sunk and flaccid, and staring feebly with wide glassy eyes, with her back coiled into a curve, and laden with shawls, was set up, among pillows, breathing, or rather gasping, with difficulty.

Here she was, bent, we may say, in the grip of two murderers, heart-complaint and cancer. The irresistible chemistry of death had set in; the return of "earth to earth" was going on. Who could have recognised, in this breathing effigy of death, poor Lady Lorrimer? But disease now and then makes short work of such transformations.

The good nurse here, like the other down-

stairs, had her little picture against the wall, and had been curtseying and crossing herself before it, in honest prayer for the dying old lady, to whom Monsieur Droqville whispered something, and then leaned his ear close to her lips. He felt her pulse, and said, "Madame has some time still to meditate and pray."

Again his ear was to her lips. "Doubt it not, madame. Every consolation."

She whispered something more; it lasted longer, and was more earnest this time. Her head was nodding on her shoulders, and her eyes were turned up to his dark energetic face, imploringly.

"You can't do that, madame—it is not yours—you have given it to God."

The woman turned her eyes on him with a piteous look.

"No, madame," he said, sharply; "it is too late to withhold a part. This, madame, is temptation—a weakness of earth; the promises are to her that overcometh."

Her only answer was an hysterical whimper and imperfect sobbing.

"Be calm," he resumed. "It is meritorious. Discharge your mind of it, and the memory of your sacrifice will be sweeter, and its promise more glorious the nearer you draw to your darkest hour on earth."

She had another word to say; her fingers were creeping on the coverlet to his hand.

"No, madame, there won't be any struggle —you will faint, that is all, and waken, we trust, among the blest. I'm sorry I can't stay just now. But Father Edwyn is here, and Doctor Garnet."

Again she turned her wavering head towards him, and lifted her eyes, as if to speak.

"No, no, you must not exert yourself—husband your strength—you'll want it, madame."

It was plain, however, she would have one last word more, and a little sourly he stooped his ear again.

"Pardon me, madame, I never said or supposed that after you signed it you were still at liberty to deal with any part; if you have courage to take it back, it is another matter. I won't send you before the Judge Eternal with a sacrilege in your right hand."

He spoke quietly, but very sternly, raising his finger upward, with his eyes fixed upon her, while his dark face looked pale.

She answered only with the same helpless whimper. He beckoned to the nun.

"Let me see that book."

He looked through its pages.

"Read aloud to madame the four first elevations; agony is near."

As he passed from the room, he beckoned the lady in the religious habit again, and whispered in her ear in the lobby,

"Lock this door, and admit none but those you know."

He went down this time to the front drawing-room, and entered it suddenly. Mr. Carmel was seated there, with candles be-

side him, reading. Down went his book instantly, and he rose.

"Our good friend upstairs won't last beyond three or four hours—possibly five," began Monsieur Droqville. "Garnet will be here in a few minutes; keep the doors bolted; people might come in and disturb the old lady. You need not mind now. I locked the hall-door as I came in. Why don't you make more way with Miss Ware? Her mother is no obstacle—favourable rather. Her father is a mere pagan, and never at home; and the girl likes you."

Mr. Carmel stared.

"Yes, you are blind; but I have my eyes. Why don't you read your Montaigne? '*Les agaceries des femmes sont des declarations d'amour.*' You interest her, and yet you profit nothing by your advantage. There she is, romantic, passionate, Quixotic, and makes, without knowing it, a hero of you. You are not what I thought you."

Mr. Carmel's colour flushed to his very

temples; he looked pained and agitated; his eyes were lowered before his superior.

"Why need you look like a fool? Understand me," continued Monsieur Droqville, in his grim, harsh nasals. "The weaknesses of human nature are Heaven's opportunities. The godly man knows how to use them with purity. She is not conscious of the position she gives you; but you should understand its power. You can illuminate, elevate, save her."

He paused for a moment; Mr. Carmel stood before him with his eyes lowered.

"What account am I to give of you?" he resumed. "Remember, you have no business to be afraid. You must use all influences to save a soul, and serve the Church. A good soldier fights with every weapon he has—sword, pistol, bayonet, fist—in the cause of his king. What shall I say of you? A loyal soldier, but wanting head, wanting action, wanting presence of mind. A theorist, a scholar, a deliberator. But not a

man for the field; no *coup d'œil*, no promptitude, no perception of a great law, where it is opposed by a small quibble, no power of deciding between a trifle and an enormity, between seeing your king robbed or breaking the thief's fingers. Why, can't you see that the power that commands is also the power that absolves? I thought you had tact—I thought you had insinuation. Have I been mistaken? If so, we must cut out other work for you. Have you anything to say?"

He paused only for a second, and in that second Mr. Carmel raised his head to speak; but with a slight downward motion of his hand, and a frown, Droqville silenced him, and proceeded:

"True, I told you not to precipitate matters. But you need not let the fire go out, because I told you not to set the chimney in a blaze. There is Mrs. Ware; her most useful position is where she is, *in equilibrio*. She can serve no one by declaring herself a

Catholic; the *éclat* of such a thing would spoil the other mission, that must be conducted with judgment and patience. The old man I told you of is a Puritan, and must see or suspect nothing. While he lives there can be no avowal. But up to that point all must now proceed. Ha! there goes a carriage—that's the third I have heard—Lady Mardykes's party breaking up. The Wares don't return this way. I'll see you again to-morrow. To-night you accomplish your duty here. The old woman upstairs will scarcely last till dawn."

He nodded and left the room as suddenly as he had entered it.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LAST LOOK.

AT about eleven o'clock next morning, mamma came to my bedside, having thrown her dressing-gown on, and holding a note in her hand. I was awakened by her calling me by my name; and the extraordinary exertion of getting out of her bed at such an hour, the morning after a ball, even if there had not been consternation in her looks, would have satisfied me that something unusual had happened. I sat up staring at her

"Oh, dear Ethel, here's a note from Doctor Droqville; I'm so shocked—poor, dear

Aunt Lorrimer is dead." And mamma burst into tears, and, sobbing, told me to read the note, which, so soon as I had a little collected myself, I did. It said:

"DEAR MRS. WARE,—I could not, of course, last night tell you the sad news about Lady Lorrimer. She arrived, it seems, on Tuesday last, to die in England. On leaving Lady Mardykes's last night, I went to her house to make inquiries; she was good enough to wish to see me. I found her in a most alarming state, and quite conscious of her danger. She was sinking rapidly. I was, therefore, by no means surprised, on calling about half an hour ago, to learn that she was no more. I lose no time in communicating the sad intelligence. It will be consolatory to you to learn that the nurses, who were present during her last moments, tell me that she died without any pain or struggle. I shall call to-morrow, as near twelve as I can, to learn whether

there is anything in which you think my poor services can be made available.

"I remain, dear Mrs. Ware,

"Ever yours sincerely,

"P. DROQVILLE."

I was very sorry. I even shed some tears, a thing oftener written about than done.

Mamma cried for a long time. She had now no near kinswoman left. When we are "pretty well on," and the thinned ranks of one generation only stand between us and death, the disappearance of the old over the verge is a serious matter. Between mamma and Lady Lorrimer, too, there were early recollections and sympathies in common, and the chasm was not so wide.

But for the young, and I was then young, the old seem at best a sort of benevolent ghosts, whose presence, more or less, chills and awes, and whose home is not properly with the younger generation. Their memo-

ries are busy with a phantom world that passed away before we were born. They are puckered masks and glassy eyes, peeping from behind the door of the sepulchre that stands ajar, closing little by little to shut them in for ever. I am now but little past forty, yet I feel this isolation stealing upon me. I acquiesce in the law of nature, though it seems a cynical one. I know I am no longer of the young; I grow shy of them; there is a real separation between us.

The world is for the young—it belongs to them, and time makes us ugly, and despised, and solitary, and prepares for our unregretted removal, for nature has ordained that death shall trouble the pleasure and economy of the vigorous, high-spirited world as little as may be.

Mamma was more grieved, a great deal, than I at all expected. I am writing now in solitude, and from my interior convictions, under a sort of obligation to tell, not

only nothing but the truth, but the whole truth also; and I confess that mamma was selfish, and, in a degree, exacting. The education of her whole married life had tended to form those habits; but she was also affectionate, and her grief was vehement, and did not subside, as I thought it would, after its first outburst. The only practical result of her grief was a determination to visit the house, and see the remains of the poor lady.

I never could understand the comfort that some people seem to derive from contemplating such a spectacle! To me the sight is simply shocking. Mamma made it a point, however, that I should accompany her. She could not make up her mind to go that day. The next day Doctor Droqville called. Mamma saw him. After they had talked for a little, mamma declared her intention of seeing poor Lady Lorrimer as she lay in her bed.

"Allow me to advise you, as a physician,

to do no such thing," said Droqville. "You'll inflict a great deal of pain on yourself, and do nobody any good."

"But unless I see her once more I shall be miserable," pleaded mamma.

"You have not nerve for such scenes," he replied; "you'd not be yourself again for a month after."

I joined my entreaties to Doctor Droqville's representations, and I thought we had finally prevailed over mamma's facile will.

He gave us a brief account of Lady Lorrimer's illness and last moments, and then talked on other subjects; finally he said, "You told me you wished me to return a bracelet that does not answer, to St. Aumand, when I pass again through Paris. I find I shall be there in a few days—can you let me have it now?"

Mamma's maid was out, so she went to get it herself, and, while she was away, Doctor Droqville said to me, with rather a stern look,

"Don't you allow her to go; your mamma has a form of the same affection of the heart. We can't tell her that; but quiet nerves are essential to her. She touches the spring of the mischief, and puts it in action at any moment by agitating herself."

"I think she has given up that intention," I answered; "but for Heaven's sake, Doctor Droqville, tell me, is mamma in any danger?"

"No, if she will only keep quiet. She may live for many years to come; but every woman, of course, who has a weakness of the kind, may kill herself easily and quickly; but—I hear her—don't allow her to go."

Mamma returned, and Doctor Droqville soon took his departure, leaving me very miserable, and very much alarmed. She now talked only of postponing her last look at poor Lady Lorrimer until to-morrow. Her vacillations were truly those of weakness, but they were sometimes violent; and when her emotions overcame her indolence, she was not easily managed.

The dark countenance of Doctor Droqville, as he urged his prohibition, excited vague suspicions. It was by no means benevolent—it was grim, and even angry. It struck me instinctively that he might have some motive, other than the kind one which he professed, in wishing to scare away mamma from the house of death.

Doctor Droqville was, I believe, a very clever physician; but his visits to England being desultory, he could not, of course, take the position of any but an occasional adviser. He had acquired an influence over mamma, and I think if he had been a resident in London, she would have consulted no other. As matters were, however, Sir Jacob Lake was her "physician in ordinary." To him I wrote the moment I had an opportunity, stating what had occurred, enclosing his fee, and begging of him to look in about two next day, on any pretext he could think of, to determine the question.

Next day came, and with two o'clock,

just as we were sitting down to lunch, Sir Jacob arrived. I ran up instantly to the drawing-room, leaving mamma to follow, for sages of his kind have not many minutes to throw away. He relieved my mind a little about mamma, but not quite, and before he had spoken half-a-dozen sentences she came in. He made an excuse of poor Lady Lorrimer's death, and had brought with him two or three letters of hers, describing her case, which he thought might be valuable should any discussion arise respecting the nature of her disease.

The conversation thus directed, I was enabled to put the question on which Doctor Droqville had been so peremptory. Sir Jacob said there was nothing to prevent mamma's going, and that she was a great deal more likely to be agitated by a dogged opposition to a thing she had so set her heart on.

Now that mamma found herself quite at liberty to go, I think she grew a little fright-

ened. She was looking ill; she had eaten nearly nothing for the last two days, seen nobody but Doctor Droqville and the doctor who had just now called, and her head was full of her mourning and mine. Her grief was very real. Through Lady Lorrimer's eyes she had been accustomed to look back into her own early life. They had both seen the same scenes and people that she remembered, and now there was no one left with whom she could talk over old times. Mamma was irresolute till late in the afternoon, and then at last she made up her mind.

We drove through half-a-dozen streets. I did not know in what street my poor aunt Lorrimer's house was. We suddenly pulled up, and the footman came to the door to say that there was a chain across the street at each end. We had nothing for it but to get out and to walk past the paviors who had taken possession of it. The sun was, I suppose, at this time about

setting. The sunlight fell faintly on the red brick chimneys above, but all beneath was dark and cold. In its present state it was a melancholy and silent street. It was, I instantly saw, the very same street in which Lady Lorrimer had chosen to pass me by.

"Is that the house, the one with the tan before it?" I asked.

It was. I was now clear upon the point. Into that house I had seen her go. The woman in the odd costume who had walked beside her, Mr. Carmel's thin figure and melancholy ascetic face, and the silence in which they moved, were all remembered, and recalled the sense of curious mystery with which I had observed the parting, more than two years ago, and mingled an unpleasant ingredient in the gloom that deepened about me as I now approached the door.

It was all to be cleared up soon. The door was instantly opened by a man in

black, placed in the hall. A man also in black, thin, very perpendicular, with a long neck, sallow face, and black eyes, very stern, passed us by in silence with a glance. He turned about before he reached the hall door, and in a low tone, a little grimly, inquired our business. I told him, and also who we were.

We were standing at the foot of the stairs. On hearing our names he took off his hat, and, more courteously, requested us to wait for a moment where we were, till he should procure a person to conduct us to the room. This man was dressed something in the style of our own High-Church divines, except that his black coat was longer, I think. He had hardly left us when there was a ring at the bell, and a poor woman, holding a little girl by the hand, came in, whispered to the man in the hall, and then, passing us by, went up the stairs in silence and disappeared. They were met by a second clergyman coming down, rather corpulent, with a tal-

lowy countenance and spectacles, who looked at us suspiciously, and went out just as a party of three came into the hall, and passed us by like the former.

Almost immediately the clergyman we had first met returned, and conducted us up the stairs as far as the first landing, where we were met by a lady in a strange brown habit, with a rosary, and a hood over her head, whom I instantly knew to be a nun. We followed her up the stairs. There was a strange air of mystery and of publicity in the proceedings; the house seemed pretty well open to all comers; no one who whispered a few words satisfactorily to the porter in the hall failed to obtain immediate access to the upper floor of the house. Everything was carried on in whispers, and there was a perpetual tramping of feet slowly going up and down stairs.

It was much more silent as we reached the level of the drawing-rooms. The nun opened the back drawing-room, and without

more ceremony than a quiet movement of her hand, signed to us to go in. I think mamma's heart half failed her; I almost hoped she would change her mind, for she hesitated, and sighed two or three times heavily, with her hand pressed to her heart, and looked very faint.

The light that escaped through the half-opened door was not that of day, but the light of candles. Mamma took my arm, and in silence hurried me into the room.

Now I will tell you what I saw. The room was hung with black, which probably enhanced the effect of its size, for it appeared very large. The windows were concealed by the hangings of black cloth, which were continued without interruption round all the walls of the room. A great many large wax candles were burning in it, and the black background, reflecting no light, gave to all the objects standing in the room an odd sharpness and relief.

At the far end of the apartment stood a

sort of platform, about as wide as a narrow bed, covered with a deep velvet cushion, with a drapery of the same material descending to the floor. On this lay the body of Lady Lorrimer, habited in the robes and hood of the order, I think, of the Carmelites; her hands were placed together on her breast, and her rosary was twined through her fingers. The hood was drawn quite up about the head and cheeks of the corpse. Her dress, the cushion on which she lay, the pillow creased by the pressure of her cold head, were strewn with flowers. I had resolved not to look at it—such sights haunt me afterwards; but an irresistible curiosity overcame me. It was just one momentary glance, but the picture has remained on my inner sight ever since, as if I had gazed for an hour.

There was at the foot of this catafalque an altar, on which was placed a large crucifix; huge candlesticks with tall tapers stood on the floor beside it. Many of the

strangers who came in kneeled before the crucifix and prayed, no doubt for the departed spirit. Many smaller crucifixes were hung upon the walls, and before these also others of the visitors from time to time said a prayer. Two nuns stood one at each side of the body, like effigies of contemplation and prayer, telling their beads. It seemed to me that there was a profusion of wax-lights. The transition from the grey evening light, darker in the house, into this illumination of tapers, had a strange influence upon my imagination. The reality of the devotion, and the more awful reality of death, quite overpowered the theatrical character of the effect.

I saw the folly of mamma's irrepressible desire to come here. I thought she was going to faint; I dare say she would have done so, she looked so very ill, but that tears relieved her. They were tears in which grief had but a subordinate share; they were nervous tears, the thunder-shower

of the hysteria which had been brewing ever since she had entered the room. I don't know whether she was sorry that she had come. I am sure she would have been better if she had never wished it.

CHAPTER XIV.

STORM.

A FEW days later, mamma and I were talking in the drawing-room, when the door opened, and papa came in, his umbrella in his hand, and his hat on his head, looking as white as death. He stood for a time without speaking. We were both staring in his face, as dumb as he.

"Droqville's a villain!" he said, suddenly. "They have got that miserable old fool's money—every guinea. I told you how it would be, and now it has all happened!"

"What has happened?" asked mamma, still gazing at him, with a look of terror. I

was myself freezing with horror. I never saw despair so near the verge of madness in a human face before as in papa's.

"What? We're ruined! If there's fifty pounds in the bank it's all, and only that between us and nothing."

"My God!" exclaimed mamma, whiter than ever, and almost in a whisper.

"Your God! What are you talking about? It is you that have done it all—filling the house with priests and Jesuits. I knew how it would be, you fool!"

Papa was speaking with the sternness of actual fury.

"I'm not to blame—it is not my doing. Frank, for Heaven's sake, don't speak so—you'll drive me mad! I don't know what they have done—I don't understand it!" cried mamma, and burst into a helpless flood of tears.

"You may as well stop that crying—you can do it in the streets by-and-by. Understand it? By Heaven, you'll understand it

well enough before long. I hope you may, as you deserve it!"

With those dreadful looks, and a voice hoarse with passion, poor papa strode out of the room, and we heard him shut the hall-door after him with a crash.

We were left with the vaguest ideas of the nature of our misfortune; his agitation was so great as to assure me that an alarming calamity had really befallen us. Mamma cried on. She was frightened by his evident alarm, and outraged by his violence, so shocking in one usually so gay, gentle, and serene. She went up to her room to cry there, and to declare herself the most miserable of women. Her maid gave her sal-volatile, and I, seeing no good or comfort in my presence, ran down to the drawing-room. I had hardly got into the room, when whom should I see arriving at the door in a cab, with some papers in his hand, but Mr. Forrester, papa's principal attorney. I knew papa was out, and I was so afraid of his

attorney's going away without giving us any light on the subject of our alarms that I ran downstairs, and told the servant to show him into the dining-room, and on no account to let him go away. I went into the room myself, and there awaited him. In came Mr. Forrester, and looked surprised at finding me only.

"Oh! Mr. Forrester," I said, going quickly to him, and looking up in his eyes, "what is this about Lady Lorrimer, and—are we quite ruined?"

"Ruined?" he repeated. "Oh, dear, not at all," and he threw a cautionary glance towards the door, and lowered his voice a little. "Why should you be ruined? It's only a disappointment. It has been very artfully done, and I was only this moment at the Temple talking the will over with one of the best men at the Bar, to whom I'm to send a brief, though I can't see, myself, any good that is likely to come of it. Everything has been done, you see,

under the best possible advice, and all the statutes steered clear of. Her estates were all turned into money—that is, the reversions sold—two years ago. The whole thing is very nearly a quarter of a million, all in money, and the will declares no trust—a simple bequest. I haven't the slightest hope of any case on the ground of undue influence. I daresay she was, in the meaning of the law, a perfectly free agent; and if she was not, depend upon it we shall never find it out."

"But does it do us any particular injury?" I inquired, not understanding one sentence in three that he spoke.

"Why, no injury, except a disappointment. In the natural course of things, all this, or the bulk of it, might very likely have come to you here. But only that. It now goes elsewhere; and I fear there is not the least chance of disturbing it."

"Then we are not ruined?" I repeated.

He looked at me, as if he were not quite

sure of my meaning, and, with a smile, answered,

"You are not a bit worse off than you were a year ago. She might have left you money, but she could take nothing from you. You have property at Cardyllion, I think, a place called Malory, and more at Golden Friars, and other things besides. But your country solicitors would know all about those things."

And thus having in some measure reassured me, he took his leave, saying he would go to papa's clubs to look for him.

I ran up to mamma, more cheerful than when I had left her. She, also, was cheered by my report, and being comforted on the immediate subject of her alarm, she began to think that his excitement was due to some fresh disappointment in his electioneering projects, and her resentment at his ill-temper increased.

This was the evening of papa's political dinner-party. A gentleman's party strictly

it was to be, and he did not choose to allow poor Aunt Lorrimer's death to prevent it. Perhaps he was sorry now that he had not postponed it; but it was too late to think of that. We were very near the close of the session. The evenings were perceptibly shortening. I remember every particular connected with that evening and night, with a sharp precision.

Papa came in at dusk. He ran upstairs, and before dressing he came into mamma's bedroom, where I was sitting at her bedside. He looked tired and ill, but was comparatively tranquil now.

"Never mind, May," he said; "it will all come right, I daresay. I wish this dinner was not to be till to-morrow. They are talking of putting me up for Dawling. One way or other, we must not despair yet. I'll come up and see you when they go away. We are a small party—only nine, you know—and I don't think there are two among them who won't be of very real use to me.

If I get in, I don't despair. I have been very low before, two or three times, and we've got up again. I don't see why we shouldn't now, as we did before."

Judging by his looks, you would have said that papa had just got out of a sick-bed, pale, ill, haggard. He looked at his watch; it was later than he thought, and he went away. We heard him ring for his man, and presently the double knocks began at the hall-door, and his party were arriving. Mamma was not very well, and whenever she was, or fancied herself ill, papa slept in another bedroom, adjoining hers, with a dressing-room off it. Ours was a large house, handsomer than would naturally have fallen to our lot; it had belonged to my grandfather, Lord Chellwood, and when he built the new house in Blank Street he settled this upon his younger son.

Mamma and I had some dinner in her room, and some tea there also. She had got over her first alarm. Papa's second visit

had been re-assuring, and she took it very nearly for granted that, after some harassing delays, and possibly a good deal of worry, the danger, whatever it was, would subside, as similar dangers had subsided before, and things would run again in their accustomed channel.

It was a very animated party; we could hear the muffled sound of their talking and laughing from the drawing-room, where they were now taking their tea and coffee, and talking, as it seemed, nearly all together. At length, however, the feast was ended, the guests departed, and papa, according to promise, came up-stairs, and, with hardly a knock at the door, came in. Had he been drinking more than usual? I don't know. He was in high spirits. He was excited, and looked flushed, and talked incessantly, and laughed ever so much at what seemed to me very indifferent jokes.

I tried to edge in a question or two about the election matters, but he did not seem to

mind, or even to hear what I said, but rattled and laughed on in the same breathless spirits.

"I'm going to bed now," he said, suddenly. "I've ever so much to do to-morrow, and I'm tired. I shall be glad when this thing is all ended."

Mamma called after him, "But you did not bid us good night." The candle, however, vanished through the second bed-room into the dressing-room, and we heard him shut the door.

"He did not hear," said mamma; "his head is so full of his election. He seems very well. I suppose everything will be right, after all."

So mamma and I talked on for a little; but it was high time that she should settle to rest. I kissed her, and away I went to my own room. There my maid, as she brushed my hair, told me all the rumours of the servants' hall and the housekeeper's room about papa's electioneering prospects. All promised

great things, and, absurd as these visions were, there was something cheering in listening to them. It was past twelve by the time my maid left me.

Very shortly after I heard a step come to my door, and papa asked, "Can I come in, dear, to say a word?"

"Oh! yes; certainly, papa," I answered, a little curious.

"I won't sit down," he said, looking round the room vaguely. He laid his candle on my table; he had a small box in his hand, in which mamma had told me he kept little lozenges of opium, his use of which had lately given her a great deal of secret uneasiness. "I have found it all out. It was that villain Droqville who did it all. He has brought us very low—broken my heart, my poor child!" He heaved a great sigh. "If that woman had never lived, if we had never heard of her, I should not have been so improvident. But that's all over. You must read your Bible, Ethel; it is a good

book; there's something in it—something in it. That governess, Miss Grey, was a good woman. I say you are young; you are not spoiled yet. You must read a little bit every night, or I'll come and scold you. Do you mind? You look very well, Ethel. You must not let your spirits down—your courage. I wish it was morning. All in good time. Get to sleep, darling. Good night—good-bye." He kissed me on the cheek and departed.

I was soon fast asleep. I think the occurrences of the earlier part of the day had made me nervous. I awoke with a start, and a vague consciousness of having been in the midst of an unpleasant dream. I thought I heard mamma call me. I jumped out of bed, threw my dressing-gown about me, and, with bare feet, walked along the lobby, now quite dark, towards mamma's door. When I got almost to it I suddenly recollected that I could not have heard mamma's voice in my room from hers. In total

darkness, solitude, and silence, I experienced the sort of chill which accompanies the discovery of such an illusion. I was just turning about, to make a hasty retreat to my own room, when I did hear mamma's voice. I heard her call papa's name, and then there was a silence. I changed my mind. I went on, and tapped at her door. Rather nervously she asked, "Who's there?" and on hearing me answer, told me to come in. There was only the night-light she usually had burning in her room. She was sitting up in her bed, and told me she had been startled by seeing papa looking in at the door (she nodded toward the one that opened to his bedroom). The night-light was placed on a little table close beside it.

"And oh! my dear Ethel, he looked so horribly ill I was frightened; I hardly knew him, and I called to him, but he only said, 'That's enough,' and drew back, and shut the door. He looked so ill, that I should have followed him in, but I found the door

locked, and I heard him shut the door of his dressing-room. Do you think he is ill?"

"Oh! no, mamma; if he had been ill he'd have told you so; I'm sure it was the miserable light in this room—everything looks so strange in it." And so with a few words more we bid good night once again; and, having seen her reclining with her head on her pillow, I made my way back again to my own room.

I felt very uncomfortable; the few words mamma had said presented an image that somehow was mysterious and ill-omened. I held my door open, and listened with my head stretched into the dark. Papa's dressing-room door was nearly opposite. I was re-assured by hearing his step on the floor; then I heard something move; I closed my own door once more, and got into bed.

The laws of acoustics are, I believe, well ascertained; and, of course, they never vary. But their action, I confess, has often puzzled me.

In the house where I now write, there are two rooms separated only by a narrow passage, in one of which, under a surgical operation, three dreadful shrieks were uttered, not one of which was, even faintly, heard in the other room, where two near and loving relations awaited the result in the silence and agony of suspense. In the same way, but not so strikingly, because the interposing space is considerably greater, no sound was ever heard in mamma's room, from papa's dressing-room, when the doors were shut. But from my door, when the rest of the house was silent, you could very distinctly hear a heavy step, or any other noise, in that room.

My visit to mamma's room had, as nurses say, "put my sleep astray," and I lay awake until I began to despair of going to sleep again till morning. From my meditations in the dead silence, I was suddenly startled by a sound like the clapping of the dressing-room door with one violent clang.

I jumped up again; I thought I should hear papa's step running down the stairs, and all my wild misgivings returned. I put my head out of the door, and listened. I heard no step—nothing stirring. Once more in my dressing-gown I stole out; his candle was still burning, for I saw a ray of light slanting towards the lobby floor from the keyhole of his room, with the motes quivering in it. It pointed like a wand to something white that lay upon the ground. I remembered that this was the open leaf of the old Bible—too much neglected book, alas! in our house—that had fallen from its little shelf on the lobby, and which I had been specially moved to replace as I passed it an hour or two before, seeing, in my superstitious mood, omens in all things. Hurried on, however, by mamma's voice calling me, I had not carried out my intention.

"Dislodged from your place, you may be," I now thought, as I stooped to take

the book in my hand; "but never to be trampled on!"

I was interrupted by a voice, a groan, I thought from inside the dressing-room.

I was not quite certain; staring breathlessly at the door, I listened; no sound followed. I stepped to the door and knocked. No answer came. With my lips close to the door, and my hand upon the handle, I called, "Papa, papa, papa!" I was frightened; I pushed open the door, and hesitated. I called again, "Papa—answer, answer! Are you there, papa?" I was calling upon silence. With a little effort I stepped in.

The candle was burning on the table; there was a film of blue smoke hovering in the air—a faint smell of burning. I saw papa lying on the floor; he appeared to have dropped from the arm-chair, and to have fallen over on his back; a pistol lay by his half-open hand; the side of his face looked black and torn, as if a thunderbolt had

scorched him, and a stream of blood seemed throbbing from his ear.

The smell of powder, the smoke, the pistol on the ground, told what had happened. Freezing with terror, I screamed the words, "Papa, papa! O God! speak! He's killed!" I was on my knees beside him; he was not quite dead. His eyes were fixed in the earnest stare of the last look, and there was a faint movement of the mouth, as if he were trying to speak. It was only for a few seconds. Then all motion ceased—his jaw fell—he was dead.

I staggered back against the wall, uttering a frightful scream.

Under excitement so tremendous as mine, people, I think, are more than half spiritualized. We seem to find ourselves translated from place to place by thought rather than effort.

It seemed to me only a second after I had left that frightful room, that I stood beside Miss Pounden's bed upstairs. She slept

with not only her shutters, but the window open. It was so perfectly silent, the street as well as the house, that through the wall from the nursery next door I could faintly hear a little baby crying. The moonlight shone dazzlingly on the white curtains of Miss Pounden's bed. I shook her by the shoulder, and called her. She started up, and I remember the odd effect of her wide-open eyes, lighted by the white reflection, and staring from the shadow at me with a horror that she caught from my looks.

"Merciful Heaven! Miss Ware—my dear child—why are you here?—what is it?"

"Come with me; we must get help. Papa is dreadfully hurt in the dressing-room. Mamma knows nothing of it; don't say a word as you pass her door."

Together we went down, steadily drawing towards the awful room, from which we saw, at the end of the dark passage, the faint flush of the candle fall on the carpet.

When I told Miss Pounden what had

happened, nothing would induce her to come with me beyond the lobby. I had to go into the room alone; I had to look in to be sure that he was actually dead. Oh! it was appalling, incredible. I, Ethel Ware, looking at my handsome, gay, good-natured father, killed by his own hands, the smoke of the fatal shot not yet quite cleared away! Why was there no pitying angel near to call me but a minute earlier? My tap at the door would have arrested his hand, and the moment of temptation would have passed harmlessly by. All too late—for time and eternity all is irretrievable now. One glance was sufficient. I could not breathe; I could not, for some dreadful moments, withdraw my eyes. With a faint cry, I stepped backward. I was trembling violently as I asked Miss Pounden to send any one of the servants for Sir Jacob Lake, and to tell whoever was going not to leave his house without him.

I waited in the drawing-room while she

went down, and I heard her call to the servants over the stairs. The message was soon arranged, and the messenger gone. I had not cried all this time; I continued walking quickly about the drawing-room, with my hands clenched together, talking wildly to myself and to God. When Miss Pounden returned, I implored of her not to leave me.

"Come up to my room; we'll wait there till Sir Jacob Lake comes. Mamma must not know it, except as he advises. If she learned it too suddenly, she would lose her mind."

CHAPTER XV.

FAREWELL, MISS WARE.

I DO not mean to describe the terrible scenes that followed. When death comes attended with a scandal like this, every recollection connected with it is torture. The gross and ghastly publicity, the merciless prying into details, and over all the gloom of the maddest and most mysterious of crimes! You look in vain in the shadow for the consoling image of hope and repose; a medium is spread around that discolours and horrifies, and the Tempter seems to haunt the house.

Then the outrage of a public tribunal

canvassing the agitations and depressions of "the deceased" in the house which within a few days was his own, handling the fatal pistol, discussing the wounds, the silent records of a mental agony that happy men cannot even imagine, and that will for life darken the secret reveries of those who loved the dead!

But as one of our proverbs, old as the days of Glastonbury, says:

> "Be the day never so long,
> At length cometh the even song."

Mamma is now in her crape and widow's cap; I in my deep mourning also, laden with crape. A great many people have called to inquire, and have left cards. A few notes, which could not be withheld, of embarrassed condolence, have come from the more intimate, who thought themselves obliged to make that sacrifice and exertion. Two or three were very kind indeed. Sore does one feel at the desertions that attend a great and sudden change of fortune. But I

do not, on fairly thinking it over, believe that there is more selfishness or less good-nature in the world in which we were living than in that wider world which lies at a lower social level. We are too ready to take the intimacies of pleasure or mere convenience as meaning a great deal more than they ever fairly can mean. They are not contracted to involve the liabilities of friendship. If they did, they would be inconveniently few. You must not expect people to sacrifice themselves for you merely because they think you good company or have similar tastes. When you begin the *facilis descensus*, people won't walk with you very far on the way. The most you can expect is a graceful, and sometimes a compassionate, farewell.

It was about a fortnight after poor papa's death that some law-papers came, which, understanding as little about such matters as most young ladies do, I sent, with mamma's approval, to Mr. Forrester, who, I mention-

ed, had been poor papa's man of business in town.

Next day he called. I was with mamma in her room at the time, and the servant came up with a little pencilled note. It said, "The papers are important, and the matter must be looked after immediately, to prevent unpleasantness." Mamma and I were both startled. "Business," which we had never even heard of before, now met us sternly face to face, and demanded instant attention. The servant said that Mr. Forrester was waiting in the drawing-room, to know whether mamma wished to see him. She asked me to go down instead, which accordingly I did.

As I entered, he was standing looking from the window with a thoughtful and rather disgusted countenance, as if he had something disagreeable to tell. He came forward and spoke very kindly, and then told me that the papers were notices to the effect that unless certain mortgages were

paid off upon a certain early day, which was named, the house and furniture would be sold. He saw how startled I was. He looked very kindly, and as if he pitied me.

"Has your mamma any relation, who understands business, to advise with under her present circumstances?" he asked.

"Chellwood, I think, ought," I began.

"I know. But this will be very troublesome; and they say Lord Chellwood is not a man of business. He'll never undertake it, I'm sure. We can try, if you like; but I think it is merely losing time and a sheet of paper, and he's abroad, I know, at Vichy; for I wrote to him to try to induce him to take an assignment of this very mortgage, and he would not, or said he could not, which means the same thing. I don't think he'll put himself out of his way for anybody. Can you think of no one else?"

"We have very few kinsmen," I answered; "they are too remote, and we know too little about them, to have any

chance of their taking any trouble for us."

"But there was a family named Rokestone connected with you at Golden Friars?"

"There is only Sir Harry Rokestone, and he is not friendly. We have reason to know he is very much the reverse," I answered.

"I hope, Miss Ware, you won't think me impertinent, but it is right you should ascertain, without further loss of time, how you stand. There are expenses going on. And all I positively know is that poor Mr. Ware's affairs are left in a very entangled state. Does your mamma know what balance there is in the bank?"

"How much money in the bank?" I repeated. "Papa said there was fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds! Oh, there must be more than that," he replied, and looked down, with a frown, upon the floor, and, with his hands in his pockets, meditated for a minute or two.

"I don't like acting alone, if it can be helped," he began again; "but if Mrs. Ware, your mamma, wishes it, I'll write to the different professional men, Mr. Jarlcot at Golden Friars, and Mr. Williams at Cardyllion, and the two solicitors in the south of England, and I'll ascertain for her, as nearly as we can, what is left, and how everything stands, and we must learn at the bank what balance stands to your credit. But I think your mamma should know that she can't possibly afford to live in the way she has been accustomed to, and it would only be prudent and right that she should give all the servants, except two or three whom she can't do without, notice of discharge. Is there a will?"

"I don't know. I think not—mamma thinks not," I said.

"I don't believe there is," he added. "It's not likely, and the law makes as good a will for him as he could have made for himself." He thought for a minute, and then

went on. "I felt a great reluctance, Miss Ware, to talk upon these unpleasant subjects; but it would not have been either kind or honest to be silent. You and your mamma will meet your change of circumstances with good sense and good feeling, I am sure. A very great change, I fear, it will be. You are not to consider me as a professional man, tell your mamma. I am acting as a friend. I wish to do all I can to prevent expense, and to put you in possession of the facts as quickly and clearly as I can, and then you will know exactly the case you have to deal with."

He took his leave, with the same air of care, thought, and suppressed fuss which belongs to the overworked man of business.

When these people make a present of their time, they are giving us something more than gold. I was not half grateful enough to him then. Thought and years have enabled me to estimate his good-nature.

I was standing at the window of a back drawing-room, a rather dark room, pondering on the kind but alarming words, at which, as at the sound of a bell, the curtain seemed to rise for a new act in my life. These worldly terrors were mingling a new poison in my grief. The vulgar troubles, which are the hardest to bear, were near us. At this inopportune moment I heard the servant announce some one, and, looking over my shoulder quickly, I saw Mr. Carmel come in. I felt myself grow pale. I saw his eye wander for a moment in search, I fancied, of mamma. I did not speak or move. The mirror reflected my figure back upon myself as I turned towards him. What did he see? Not quite the same Ethel Ware he had been accustomed to. My mourning-dress made me look taller, thinner, and paler than before. I could not have expected to see him; I looked, I suppose, as I felt, excited, proud, pained, resentful.

He came near; his dark eyes looked at

me inquiringly. He extended his hand, hesitated, and said:

"I am afraid I did wrong. I ought not to have asked to see you."

"We have not seen anyone—mamma or I—except one old friend, who came a little time ago."

My own voice sounded cold and strange in my ear; I felt angry and contemptuous. Had I not reason? I did not give him my hand, or appear to perceive that he had advanced his. I could see, though I did not look direct at him, that he seemed pained.

"I thought, perhaps, that I had some claim, also, as an old friend," he began, and paused.

"Oh! I quite forgot that," I repeated, in the same tones; "an old friend, to be sure." I felt that I smiled bitterly.

"You look at me as if you hated me, Miss Ware," he said—"why should you? What have I done?"

"Why do you ask me? Ask yourself.

Look into your conscience. I think, Mr. Carmel, you are the last person who should have come here."

"I won't affect to misunderstand you; you think I influenced Lady Lorrimer," he said.

"The whole thing is coarse and odious," I said. "I hate to speak or think of it; but, shocking as it is, I must. Lady Lorrimer had no near relations but mamma; and she intended—she told her so in my hearing—leaving money to her by her will. It is, I think, natural and right that people should leave their money to those they love—their own kindred—and not to strangers. I would not complain if Lady Lorrimer had acted of her own thought and will in the matter. But it was far otherwise; a lady, nervous and broken in health, was terrified, as death approached, by people, of whom you were one, and thus constrained to give all she possessed into the hands of strangers, to forward theological intrigues, of which she

could understand nothing. I say it was unnatural, cruel, and rapacious. That kind lady, if she had done as she wished, would have saved us from all our misery."

"Will you believe me, Miss Ware?" he said, in the lowest possible tones, grasping the back of the chair, on which his hand rested, very hard, "I never knew, heard, or suspected that Lady Lorrimer had asked or received any advice respecting that will, which I see has been publicly criticised in some of the papers. I never so much as heard that she had made a will. I entreat, Miss Ware, that you will believe me."

"In matters where your Church is concerned, Mr. Carmel, I have heard that prevarication is a merit. With respect to all that concerns poor Lady Lorrimer, I shall never willingly hear another word from you, nor ever speak to you again."

I turned to the window, and looked out for a minute or two, with my fingers on the window-sash. Then I turned again rather

suddenly. He was standing on the same spot, in the same attitude, his hands clasped together, his head lowered, his eyes fixed in a reverie on the ground, and I thought I saw the trace of tears on his cheek.

My moving recalled him, and he instantly looked up and said,

"Let me say a word—whatever sacrifice my holy calling may impose, I accept with gratitude to Heaven. We are not pressed into this service—we are volunteers. The bride at the altar never took vow more freely. We have sworn to obey, to suffer, to fight, to die. Forewarned, and with our eyes opened, we have cast all behind us: the vanities, hopes, and affections of mortality—according to the word of God, hating father, mother, sister, brother; we take up the heavy cross, and follow in the blood-stained footsteps of our Master, pressing forward; with blind obedience and desperate stoicism, we smile at hunger, thirst, heat and cold, sickness, perils, bonds, and death.

Such soldiers, you are right in thinking, will dare everything but treason. If I had been commanded to withhold information from my dearest friend, to practise any secresy, or to exert for a given object any influence, I should have done so. All human friendship is subject with me to these inexorable conditions. Is there any prevarication there? But with respect to Lady Lorrimer's will, I suggested nothing, heard nothing, thought nothing."

All this seemed to me very cool. I was angry. I smiled again, and said,

"You must think all that very childish, Mr. Carmel. You tell me you are ready to mislead me upon any subject, and you expect me to believe you upon this."

"Of course that strikes you," he said, "and I have no answer but this: I have no possible motive in deceiving you—all that is past, inexorable, fixed as death itself!"

"I neither know nor care with what purpose you speak. It is clear to me, Mr.

Carmel, that with your principles, as I suppose I must call them, you could be no one's friend, and no one but a fool could be yours. It seems to me you are isolated from all human sympathies; toward such a person I could feel nothing but antipathy and fear; you don't stand before me like a fellow-creature, but like a spirit—and not a good one."

"The seprinciples, Miss Ware, of which you speak so severely, Protestants, the most religious, practise with as little scruple as we, in their warfare, in their litigation, in their diplomacy, in their ordinary business, wherever, in fact, hostile action is suspected. If a Laodicean community were as earnest about winning souls as they are about winning battles, or lawsuits, or money, or elections, we should hear very little of such weak exceptions against the inevitable strategy of zeal and faith."

I made him no answer; perhaps I could not do so at the moment. I was ex-

cited; his serene temper made me more so.

"I have described my obligations, Miss Ware," he said. "Your lowest view of them can now charge me with no treachery to you. It is true I cannot be a friend in the sense in which the world reads friendship. My first allegiance is to Heaven; and in the greatest, as in the minutest things, all my obedience is due to that organ of its will which Heaven has placed above me. If all men thought more justly, such relations would not require to be disclosed or defended; they would simply be taken for granted—reason deduces them from the facts of our faith; we are the creatures of one God, who has appointed one Church to be the interpreter of his will upon earth."

"Every traitor is a sophist, sir; I have neither skill nor temper for such discussions," I answered, proving my latter position sufficiently. "I had no idea that you could have thought of visiting here, and I hoped I should have been spared the pain

of seeing you again. Nor should I like to continue this conversation, because I might be tempted to say even more pointedly what I think than I care to do. Good-bye, Mr. Carmel, good-bye, sir," I repeated, with a quiet emphasis meant to check, as I thought, his evident intention to speak again.

He so understood it. He paused for a moment, undecided, and then said,

"Am I to understand that you command me to come no more?"

"Certainly," I answered, coldly and angrily.

His hand was on the door, and he asked very gently, but I thought with some little agitation:

"And that you now end our acquaintance?"

"Certainly," I repeated, in the same tone.

"Heaven has sent me my share of sorrow," he said; "but no soldier of Christ

goes to his grave without many scars. I deserve my wounds and submit. It must be long before we meet again under any circumstances; never, perhaps, in this life."

He looked at me. He was very pale, and his large eyes were full of kindness. He held out his hand to me silently, but I did not take it. He sighed deeply, and placed it again on the handle of the door, and said, very low:

"Farewell, Miss Ware—Ethel—my pupil, and may God for ever bless you!" So the door opened, and he went.

I heard the hall-door shut. That sullen sound smote my heart like a signal telling me that my last friend was gone.

Few people who have taken an irrevocable step on impulse, even though they have done rightly, think very clearly immediately after. My own act for a while confounded me. I don't think that Mr. Carmel was formed by nature for deception. I think, in my inmost soul, I believed his denial,

and was sure that he had neither act nor part in the management of Lady Lorrimer's will. I know I felt a sort of compunction, and I experienced that melancholy doubt as to having been quite in the right, which sometimes follows an angry scene. In this state I returned to mamma to tell her all that had passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RAINY DAY.

MAMMA knew nothing distinctly about the state of our affairs, but she knew something generally of the provision made at her marriage, and she thought we should have about a thousand a year to live upon.

I could hardly recognise the possibility of this, with Mr. Forrester's forebodings. But if that, or even something like it, were secured to us, we could go down to Malory, and live there very comfortably. Mamma's habits of thinking, and the supine routine of her useless life, had sustained a shock, and her mind seemed now to rest with pleasure on the comparative solitude and quiet of a country life.

All our servants, except one or two, were under notice to go. I had also got leave from mamma to get our plate, horses, carriages, and other superfluous things valued, and fifty other trifling measures taken to expedite the winding-up of our old life, and our entrance upon our new one, the moment Mr. Forrester should tell us that our income was ascertained, and available.

I was longing to be gone, so also was mamma. She seemed very easy about our provision for the future, and I, alternating between an overweening confidence and an irrepressible anxiety, awaited the promised disclosures of Mr. Forrester, which were to end our suspense.

Nearly a fortnight passed before he came again. A note reached us the day before, saying that he would call at four, unless we should write in the meantime to put him off. He did come, and I shall never forget the interview that followed. Mamma and I were sitting in the front drawing-room,

expecting him. My heart was trembling. I know of no state so intolerable as suspense upon a vital issue. It is the state in which people in money troubles are, without intermission. How it is lived through for years, as often as it as, and without the loss of reason, is in my eyes the greatest physical and psychological wonder of this sorrowful world.

A gloomier day could hardly have heralded the critical exposition that was to disclose our future lot. A dark sky, clouds dark as coal-smoke, and a steady downpour of rain, large-dropped and violent, that keeps up a loud and gusty drumming on the panes, down which the wet is rushing in rivers. Now and then the noise rises to a point that makes conversation difficult. Every minute at this streaming window I was looking into the street, where cabs and umbrellas, few and far between, were scarcely discoverable through the rivulets that coursed over the glass.

At length I saw a cab, like a waving mass of black mist, halt at the door, and a double knock followed. My breath almost left me. In a minute or two the servant, opening the door, said, "Mr. Forrester," and that gentleman stepped into the gloomy room, with a despatch-box in his hand, looking ominously grave and pale. He took mamma's hand, and looked, I thought, with a kind of doubtful inquiry in her face, as if measuring her strength to bear some unpleasant news. I almost forgot to shake hands with him, I was so horribly eager to hear him speak.

Mamma was much more confident than I, and said, as soon as he had placed his box beside him, and sat down,

"I'm so obliged to you, Mr. Forrester; you have been so extremely kind to us. My daughter told me that you intended making inquiries, and letting us know all you heard; and I hope you think it satisfactory?"

He looked down, and shook his head in silence. Mamma flushed very much, and stood up, staring at him, and then grew deadly pale.

"It is not—it can't be less—I hope it's not—than nine hundred a year. If it is not that, what is to become of us?"

Mamma's voice sounded hard and stern, though she spoke very low. I, too, was staring at the messenger of fate with all my eyes, and my heart was thumping hard.

"Very far from satisfactory. I wish it were anything at all like the sum you have named," said Mr. Forrester, very dejectedly, but gathering courage for his statement as he proceeded. "I'll tell you, Mrs. Ware, the result of my correspondence, and I am really pained and grieved that I should have such a statement to make. I find that you opened your marriage settlement, except the provision for your daughter, which, I regret to say, is little more than a thousand pounds, and she takes nothing during

your life, and then we can't put it down at more than forty pounds a year."

"But—but I want to know," broke in poor mamma, with eyes that glared, and her very lips white, "what there is—how much we have got to live on?"

"I hope from my heart there may be something, Mrs. Ware, but I should not be treating you fairly if I did not tell you frankly that it seems to me a case in which relations ought to come forward."

I felt so stunned that I could not speak.

"You mean, ask their assistance?" said mamma. "My good God! I can't—we can't—I could not do that!"

"Mamma," said I, with white lips, "had not we better hear all that Mr. Forrester has to tell us?"

"Allow me," continued mamma, excitedly; "there must be something, Ethel—don't talk folly. We can live at Malory, and, however small our pittance, we must make it do. But I won't consent to beg."

Mamma's colour came again as she said this, with a look of haughty resentment at Mr. Forrester. That poor gentleman seemed distressed, and shifted his position a little uneasily.

"Malory," he began, "would be a very suitable place, if an income were arranged. But Malory will be in Sir Harry Rokestone's possession in two or three days, and without his leave you could not go there; and I'm afraid I dare not encourage you to entertain any hopes of a favourable, or even a courteous, hearing in that quarter. Since I had the pleasure of seeing Miss Ware here, about ten days or a fortnight since, I saw Mr. Jarlcot, of Golden Friars; a very intelligent man he evidently he is, and does Sir Harry Rokestone's business in that part of the world, and seemed very friendly; but he says that in that quarter"—Mr. Forrester paused, and shook his head gloomily, looking on the carpet—"we have nothing good to look for. He bears your family, it

appears, an implacable animosity, and does not scruple to express it in very violent language indeed."

"I did not know that Sir Harry Rokestone had any claim upon Malory," said mamma; "I don't know by what right he can prevent our going into my house."

"I'm afraid there can be no doubt as to his right as a trustee; but it was not obligatory on him to enforce it. Some charges ought to have been paid off four years ago; it is a very peculiar deed, and, instead of that, interest has been allowed to accumulate. I took the liberty of writing to Sir Harry Rokestone a very strong letter, the day after my last interview with Miss Ware; but he has taken not the slightest notice of it, and that is very nearly a fortnight ago, and Jarlcot seems to think that, if he lets me off with silence, I'm getting off very easily. They all seem afraid of him down there."

I fancied that Mr. Forrester had been talking partly to postpone a moment of pain.

If there was a shock coming, he wanted resolution to precipitate the crisis, and looked again with a perplexed and uneasy countenance on the carpet. He glanced at mamma, once or twice, quickly, as if he had nearly made up his mind to break the short silence that had followed. While he was hesitating, however, I was relieved by mamma's speaking, and very much to the point.

"And how much do you think, Mr. Forrester, we shall have to live upon?"

"That," said he, looking steadfastly on the table, with a very gloomy countenance, "is the point on which, I fear, I have nothing satisfactory—or even hopeful," he added, raising his head, and looking a little stern, and even frightened, "to say. You must only look the misfortune in the face; and a great misfortune it is, accustomed as you have been to everything that makes life happy and easy. It is, as I said before, a case in which relations who are wealthy, and well able to do it, should come forward."

"But do say what it is," said mamma, trembling violently. "I shan't be frightened, only say distinctly. Is it only four hundred? —or only three hundred a year?" She paused, looking imploringly at him.

"I should be doing very wrong if I told you there was anything—anything like that —anything whatever certain, in fact, however small. There's nothing certain, and it would be very wrong to mislead you. I don't think the assets and property will be sufficient to pay the debts."

"Great Heaven! Sir—oh! oh!—is there nothing left?"

He shook his head despondingly. The murder was out now; there was no need of any more questioning—no case could be simpler. We were not worth a shilling!

If in my vain and godless days the doctor at my bedside had suddenly told me that I must die before midnight, I could not have been more bewildered. Without knowing what I did, I turned and walked to the win-

dow, on which the rain was thundering, and rolling down in rivers. I heard nothing—my ears were stunned.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FLITTING.

WE were ruined! What must the discovery have been to poor mamma? She saw all the monstrous past—the delirium was dissipated. An abyss was between her and her former life. In the moment of social death, all that she was leaving had become almost grotesque, incredibly ghastly. Here in a moment was something worse than poverty, worse even than death.

During papa's life the possibility of those vague vexations known as "difficulties" and "embarrassments," might have occurred to me, but that I should ever have found myself in the plight in which I now stood had never entered my imagination.

Suppose, on a fine evening, a ship, with a crash like a cannon, tears open her planks on a hidden rock, and the water gushes and whirls above the knees, the waists, the throats of the polite people round the tea-table in the state-cabin, without so much as time interposed to say God bless us! between the warning and the catastrophe, and you have our case!

Young ladies, you live in a vague and pleasant dream. Gaslight in your hall and lobbies, wax lights, fires, decorous servants, flowers, spirited horses, millinery, soups and wines, are products of nature, and come of themselves. There is, nevertheless, such a thing as poverty, as there is such a thing as death. We hold them both as doctrines, and, of course, devoutly believe in them, but when either lays its cold hand on your shoulder, and you look it in the face, you are as much appalled as if you had never heard its name before.

Carelessness, indolence, a pleasurable

supineness, without any other grievous fault or enormous mistake, had, little by little, prepared all for the catastrophe. Mamma was very ill that night. In the morning Mr. Forrester came again. Mamma could not see him; but I had a long interview with him. He was very kind. I will tell you, in a few words, the upshot of our conference.

In the first place, the rather startling fact was disclosed that we had, in the world, but nine pounds, eight shillings, which mamma happened still to have in her purse, out of her last money for dress. Nine pounds, eight shillings! That was all that interposed between us and the wide republic of beggary. Then Mr. Forrester told me that mamma must positively leave the house in which we were then residing, to avoid being made, as he said, "administratrix in her own wrong," and put to great annoyance, and seeing any little fund that relations might place at her disposal wasted in expenses and possible litigation.

So it was settled we were to leave the house, but where were we to go? That was provided for. Near High Holborn, in a little street entered between two narrow piers, stood an odd and ancient house, as old as the times of James the First, which was about to be taken down to make way for a model lodging-house. The roof was sound, and the drainage good, that was all he could say for it; and he could get us leave to occupy it, free of rent, until its demolition should be commenced. He had, in fact, already arranged that for mamma.

Poor papa had owed him a considerable sum for law costs. He meant, he said, to remit the greater part of it, and whatever the estate might give him, on account of them, he would hand over to mamma. He feared the sum would be a small one. He thought it would hardly amount to a hundred pounds, but in the meantime she could have fifty pounds on account of it.

She might also remove a very little fur-

niture, but no more than would just suffice, in the scantiest way, for our bed-rooms and one sitting-room, and such things as a servant might take for the kitchen. He would make himself responsible to the creditors for these.

I need not go further into particulars. Of course there were many details to be adjusted, and the conduct of all these arrangements devolved upon me. Mr. Forrester undertook all the dealings with the servants whom it was necessary to dismiss and pay forthwith.

The house was now very deserted. There was no life in it but that feverish fuss like the preparations that condemned people make for their executions. The arrangements for our sorrowful flight went on like the dismal worry of a sick dream. In our changed state we preferred country servants, and I wrote for good old Rebecca Torkill and one of her rustic maids at Malory, who arrived, and entered on their

duties the day before our departure. How outlandish these good creatures appeared when transplanted from the primitive life and surroundings of Malory to the artificial scenes of London! But how comfortable and kindly was their clumsiness compared with the cynical politeness and growing contempt of the cosmopolitan servants of London!

Well, at last we were settled in our strange habitation. It was by no means so uncomfortable as you might have supposed. We found ourselves in a sitting-room of handsome dimensions, panelled with oak up to its ceiling, which, however, from the size of the room, appeared rather low. It was richly moulded, after the style of James the First's reign, but the coarse smear of newly-applied whitewash covered its traceries.

Our scanty furniture was collected at the upper end of the apartment, which was covered with a piece of carpet, and shut off

from the lower part of the room by a folding screen. Some kind friend had placed flowers in a glass on the table, and three pretty plants in full blow upon the window-stones. Some books from a circulating library were on the table, and some volumes also of engravings. These little signs of care and refinement took off something of the gaunt and desolate character which would have, otherwise, made this habitation terrifying.

A rich man, with such a house in the country, might have made it curiously beautiful; but where it was, tenanted by paupers, and condemned to early demolition, who was to trouble his head about it?

Mamma had been better in the morning, but was now suffering, again, from a violent palpitation, and was sitting up in her bed; it was her own bed, which had been removed for her use. Rebecca Torkill, who had been for some hours managing everything to receive her, was now in her room. I was

in our "drawing-room," I suppose I am to call it, quite alone. My elbows rested on the table, my hands were over my eyes, and I was crying vehemently. These were tears neither of cowardice nor of sorrow. They were tears of rage. I was one of those impracticable and defiant spirits who, standing more in need than any other of the chastisements of Heaven, resent its discipline as an outrage, and upbraid its justice with impious fury. I dried my eyes fiercely. I looked round our strange room with a bitter smile. Black oak floor, black oak panelling up to the ceiling; as evening darkened how melancholy this grew!

I looked out of the window. The ruddy sky of evening was fading into grey. A grass-grown brick wall, as old as the house perhaps, and springing from the two piers, enclosed the space once occupied by the street in which it had stood. Nothing now remained of the other houses but high piles of rubbish, broken bricks, and plaster,

through which, now and then, a black spar or plank of worn wood was visible in this dismal enclosure; beyond these hillocks of ruin, and the jagged and worn brick wall, were visible the roofs with slates no bigger than oyster-shells, and the clumsy old chimneys of poverty-stricken dwellings, existing on sufferance, and sure to fall before long beneath the pick and crowbar; beyond these melancholy objects spread the expiring glow of sunset with a veil of smoke before it.

As I looked back upon this sombre room, and then out upon the still more gloomy and ruinous prospect, with a feeling of disgust and fear, and the intolerable consciousness that we were here under the coercion of actual poverty, you may fancy what my ruminations were. I don't know whether, in my family, there was a vein of that hereditary melancholy called suicidal. I know I felt, just then, its horrible promptings. Like the invitations of the Erl-king in

Goethe's ballad, it "whispered low in mine ear." There is nothing so startling as the first real allurement to this tremendous step. There remains a sense of an actual communication at which mind and soul tremble. I felt it once afterwards.

Its insidiousness and power are felt on starting from the dream, and finding oneself, as I did, alone, with silence and darkness and frightful thoughts. I think that, but for mamma, it would have been irresistible. The sudden exertion of my will, and in spite of my impious mood, I am sure, an inward cry to God for help, scared away the brood that had gathered about me with their soft monotonous seduction. Have you ever experienced the same thing? The temptation breaks from you like a murmur changed to a laugh, and leaves you horrified. I hated life; my energies were dead already. Why should I drag on, with broken heart, in solitude and degradation?

Some pitying angel kept me in remem-

brance of mamma, sick, helpless, so long and entirely in the habit of leaning upon others for counsel and for action. When sickness follows poverty, fate has little left to inflict. One good thing in our present habitation was the fact of its being as completely out of sight as the inmost cavern of the catacombs. That was consolatory. I felt, at first, as if I never should wish to see the light again. But every expression of life is strong in the young; energy, health, spirits, hope.

The dread of this great downfall began to subside, and I could see a little before me; my head grew clearer, and was already full of plans for earning my bread. That, I dare say, would have been easy enough, if I could have made up my mind to leave mamma, or if she could have consented to part with me. But there were many things I could do at home. Mamma was sometimes better, but her spirits never rallied. She cried almost incessantly; I think she was

heart-broken. If she could have given me some of her gentleness, and if I could have inspired her with some of my courage, we should have done better.

The day after our arrival, as I looked out of the window listlessly, I saw a van drive between the piers. Two men were on the driver's seat. They stopped before they had got very far. It was difficult navigation among the promontories and islands of rubbish. The driver turned a disgusted look up towards our windows, and made some remark to his companion. They got down and led the horses with circumspection, and with many turns and windings up to the door, and then began to speak to our servant; but, at this interesting moment, I was summoned by Rebecca Torkill to mamma's room, where I forgot all about the van.

But, on returning a few minutes later, I found a piano in our drawing-room. Our rustic maid had not heard or even asked

from whom it came; and when a tuner arrived an hour later, I found that nothing could prevail on him to disclose the name of the person or place from which it had come. It had not any indication but the maker's name, and that was no guide.

Two or three days after our flight to this melancholy place, Mr. Forrester called. I saw him in our strange sitting-room. It was pleasant to see a friendly face. He had not many minutes to give me. He listened to my plans, and rather approved of them; told me that he had some clients who might be useful, and that he would make it a point to do what he could with them. Then I thanked him very much for the flowers, and the books, and the piano. But it was not he who had sent them. I began to be rather unpleasantly puzzled about the quarter from which these favours came. Our melancholy habitation must be known to more persons than we supposed. I was

thinking uncomfortably on this problem when he went on to say:

"As Mrs. Ware is not well enough to see me, I should like to read to you a draft of the letter I was thinking of sending to-day to Lord Chellwood's house. He's to be home, I understand, for a day or two before the end of this week; and I want to hit him on the wing, if I can."

He then read the letter for me.

"Pray leave out what you say of me," I said.

"Why, Miss Ware?"

"Because, if I can't live by my own labour, I will die," I answered. "I think it is his duty to do something for mamma, who is ill, and the widow of his brother, and who has lost her provision by poor papa's misfortunes; but I mean to work; and I hope to earn quite enough to support me; and if I can't, as I said, I don't wish to live. I will accept nothing from him."

"And why not from him, Miss Ware? You know he's your uncle. Whom could you more naturally look to in such an emergency?"

"He's not my uncle; papa was his half-brother only, by a later marriage. He never liked papa—nor us."

"Never mind—he'll do something. I've had some experience; and I tell you, he can't avoid contributing in a case like this; it comes too near him," said Mr. Forrester.

"I have seen him—I have heard him talk; I know the kind of person he is. I have heard poor papa say, 'I wish some one would relieve Norman's mind: he seems to fancy we have a design on his pocket, or his will. He is always keeping us at arm's-length. I don't think my wife is ever likely to have to ask him for anything.' I have heard poor papa say, I think, those very words. Bread from his hand would choke me, and I can't eat it."

"Well, Miss Ware, if you object to that

passage, I shall strike it out, of course. I wrote a second time to Sir Harry Rokestone, and have not yet had a line in reply, and I don't think it likely I ever shall. I'll try him once more; and if that doesn't bring an answer, I think we may let him alone for some time to come."

And now Mr. Forrester took his leave and was gone. The forlorn old house was silent again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FORLORN HOPE.

ANOTHER week passed; mamma was better—not much better in spirits, but very much apparently in health. She was now a great deal more tranquil, though in great affliction. Poor mamma! No book interested her now but the Bible; the great, wise, gentle friend so seldom listened to when all goes well—always called in to console, when others fail.

Mr. Forrester had got me some work to do—work much more interesting than I had proposed for myself. It was to make a translation of a French work for a publisher. For a few days it was simply experimental,

but it was found that I did it well and quickly enough; and I calculated that if I could only obtain constant employment of this kind, I might earn about seventy pounds a year. Here was a resource—something between us and actual want—something between me and the terrible condition of dependence. My ambition was humble enough now.

For about two days this discovery of my power, under favourable circumstances, to make sixty or seventy pounds a year, actually cheered me; but this healthier effect was of but short duration. The miseries of our situation were too obvious and formidable to be long kept out of view. Gloom and distraction soon returned—the same rebellious violence inflamed by the fresh alarm of mamma's returning illness.

She was very ill again the night but one after the good news about my translation—breathless, palpitating. I began to grow frightened and desponding about her. I had

fancied before that her symptoms were mere indications of her state of mind; but now, when her mind seemed more tranquil, and her nerves quiet, their return was ominous. I was urging her to see Sir Jacob Lake, when Mr. Forrester called, and I went to our drawing-room to see him. He had got a note, cold and petulant, from my uncle, Lord Chellwood, that morning. This letter said that "no person who knew of the number and magnitude of the charges affecting his property could be so unreasonable as to suppose that he could, even if he had the power, which was not quite so clear, think of charging an annuity upon it, however small, for the benefit of anyone." That "he deeply commiserated the distressing circumstances in which poor Frank's widow found herself; but surely he, Lord Chellwood, was not to blame for it. He had never lost an opportunity of pressing upon his brother the obligation he conceived every married man to be under, to make provision

for his wife; and had been at the trouble to show him, by some very pertinent figures, how impracticable it was for him to add to the burdens that weighed on the estates, and how totally he, Lord Chellwood, was without the power of mitigating to any extent the consequences of his rashness, if he should leave his wife without a suitable provision." So it went on; and ended by saying that "he might possibly be able, next Spring, to make—it could be but a small one—a present to the poor lady, who had certainly much to answer for in the imprudent career in which she had contributed to engage her husband, and during which she had wilfully sacrificed her settlement to the pleasures and vanities of an expensive and unsuitable life." The letter went on in this strain, and hinted that the present he spoke of could not exceed a hundred and fifty pounds, and could not possibly be repeated.

"This looks very black, you see," said the

good-natured solicitor. "But I hope it may not be quite so bad as he says. If he could be got to do a little more, a small annuity might be purchased."

I did not like my uncle. It is very hard to get over first impressions, and the repulsion of an entirely uncongenial countenance. There was nothing manly in his face—it was narrow, selfish, conceited. He was pale as wax. He had manners at once dry and languid; and whether it was in his eye or not, I can't say, but there was something in his look, though he smiled as much as was called for, and never said a disagreeable thing, that conveyed very clearly to me, although neither papa nor mamma seemed to perceive it, that he positively disliked us, each and every one, not even excepting poor, gay, good-natured papa. We all knew he was stingy; he had one hobby, and that was the nursing and rehabilitation of the estates which had come to him, with the title, in a very crippled state.

With these feelings, and the pride which is strongest in youth, I fancied that I should have died rather than have submitted to the humiliation of accepting, much less asking, money from his hand.

I must carry you three weeks further on. It was dark; I can't tell you now what o'clock it was; I am sure it was not much earlier than nine. I had my cloak and bonnet on; Rebecca Torkill was at my side, and her thin hand was upon my arm.

"And where are you going, my darling, at this time of night?" she said, looking frightened into my face.

"To see Lord Chellwood; to see papa's unnatural brother; to tell him that mamma must die unless he helps her."

"But, my child, this is no time—you would not go out through them wicked streets at this hour—you shan't go!" she said sturdily, taking a firm hold of my arm.

I snatched it from her grasp angrily, and

walked quickly away. I looked over my shoulder, as I reached the two piers, and saw the figure of old Rebecca looking black in the doorway, with a background of misty light from the candle at the foot of the stairs. I think she was wavering between the risk of leaving the house and mamma only half protected, and the urgent necessity of pursuing and bringing me back. I was out of her reach, however, before she could make up her mind.

I was walking as quickly as I could through the streets that led towards Regent-street. I had studied them on the map.

These out-of-the-way streets were quiet now, but not deserted; now and then I passed the blaze of a gin-palace. It was a strange fear and excitement to me to be walking through these poor by-streets by gas-light. No fugitive threading the streets of a town in the throes of revolution had a keener sense of danger, or moved with eye and sinew more ready every moment to

start from a walk into a run. I suppose they allow poor people, such as I might well be taken for, walking quickly upon their business, to pass undisturbed. I was not molested.

At length I was in Regent-street. I felt safe now; the broad pavement, the stream of traffic, the long line of gas-lamps, and the still open shops, enabled me, without fear, a little to slacken my pace. I required this relief. I had been ill for two days, and was worse. I felt chilly and aguish; I was suffering from one of those stupendous headaches which possibly give the sufferer some idea of the action of that iron "cap of silence" with which, during the reign of good King Bomba, so many Neapolitan citizens were made acquainted. I can afford to speak lightly of it now; but I was very ill. I ought to have been in my bed. Nothing but my tremor about mamma would have given me nerve and strength for this excursion.

She had that day had a sudden return of the breathlessness and palpitation from which she had suffered so much, and I had succeeded in getting Sir Jacob Lake to come to see her.

It was a hurried visit, as his visits always were. He saw her, gave some general directions, wrote a prescription, spoke cheerfully to her, and his manner seemed to say he apprehended nothing. I came with him to the stairs, which we went down together, and in the drawing-room I heard the astounding words that told me mamma could not live many months, and might be carried off at any moment in one of those attacks. He told me to get her to the country, her native air, if that could be managed, immediately. That might prolong her life a little. It was only a chance, and at best a reprieve. But without it he could not answer for a week. He told me that I must be careful not to let mamma know that he thought her in danger. She was in a critical state,

and any agitation might be fatal. He took his leave, and I was alone with his dreadful words in my ears.

Now, how was I to carry out his directions? The journey to Golden Friars, as he planned it, would cost us at least twenty pounds, and he ordered claret, then a very expensive wine, for mamma. He did not know that he was carrying away our last guinea in his pocket. I had but half a sovereign and a few shillings in my purse. Mr. Forrester was out of town; and even if he were within reach, it was scarcely likely that he would lend or bestow anything like the sum required. The work was not sufficiently advanced to justify a hope that he would give me, a stranger, a sum of money on account of a task which I might never complete. Poverty had come in its direst shape. In the distraction of that dreadful helplessness my pride broke down. This was the reason of my wild excursion.

As I now walked at a more moderate

pace, I felt the effect of my unnatural exertion more painfully—every pulse was a throb of torture. It was an effort to keep my mind clear, and to banish perpetually rising confusions, the incipient exhalations of fever. What drowsiness is to the system in health, this tendency to drop into delirium is to the sick.

I found myself, at length, almost exhausted, at my noble kinsman's door. I knocked; I asked to see him. The footman did not recognise me. He simply said, looking across the street over my head, with a careless disdain:

"I say, what's the row, miss?"

Certainly such a visitor as I, and at such an hour, had no very recognisable claim to a ceremonious reception.

"Charles," I said, "don't you know me? —Miss Ware."

The man started a little, looked hard at me, drew himself up formally, as he made

his salutation, receding a step, with the hall-door open in his hand.

"Is his lordship at home?" I asked.

"No, miss, he dined out to-day."

"But I must see him, Charles. If he knew it was I he could not refuse. Tell him mamma is dangerously ill, and I have no one to help me."

"He is out, miss; and he sleeps out of town—at Colonel Anson's to-night."

I uttered an exclamation of despair.

"And when is he to return?"

"He will not be in town again for a fortnight, miss; he's going to Harleigh Castle."

I stood on the steps for a minute, stunned by the disappointment, staring helplessly into the man's face.

"Please, shall I call a cab, miss?"

"No—no," I said dreamily. I turned and went away quickly. It troubled me little what the servants might say or think of my strange visit.

This blow was distracting. The doctor had distinctly said that mamma's immediate removal to country air was a necessity.

As people will under excitement, I was walking at the swiftest pace I could. I was pacing under the evergreens of the neighbouring square, back and forward, again and again; I saw young ladies get from a house opposite into a carriage, and drive away, as I once used to do. I hated them—I hated everyone who was as fortunate as I once was. I hated the houses on the other side with their well-lighted halls. I hated even the great prosperous shop-keeping class, with their overgrown persons and purses. Why did not fortune take other people, the purse-proud, the scheming, the vicious, the arrogant, the avaricious, instead of us—drag them from their places, and batter and trundle them in the gutter? Here was I, for no fault—none, none!—reduced to a worse plight than a beggar's. The beggar has been brought up to his calling, and can

make something of it; while I could not set about it, had not even that form of pluck which people call meanness, and was quite past the age at which the art is to be learned.

All this time I was growing more and more ill. The breathless walking and the angry agitation were precipitating the fever that was already upon me. I had an increasing horror of the dismal abode which was now my home. Distraction like mine demands rapid locomotion as its proper and only anodyne. Despair and quietude quickly subside into madness.

Some public clock not far off struck the hour; I did not count it; but it reminded me suddenly of the risk of exciting alarm at home by delaying my return. So with an effort, and as it were an awakening, I began to direct my steps homewards. But before I reached that melancholy goal, an astounding adventure was fated to befall me.

CHAPTER XIX.

COLD STEEL.

I AM quite certain now that the impious sophistries to which some proud minds in affliction abandon themselves, are the direful suggestions of intelligences immensely superior in power to ourselves. When they call to us in the air we listen; when they knock at the door we go down and open to them; we take them in to sup with us, we make them our guests, they become sojourners in the house, and are about our paths, and about our beds, and spying out all our ways; their thoughts become our thoughts, their wickedness our wickedness, their purposes our purposes, till, without perceiving it, we are their slaves. And then

when a fit opportunity presents itself, they make, in Doctor Johnson's phrase, "a snatch of us." Something like this was near happening to me. You shall hear.

I grew, on a sudden, faint and cold; a horror of returning home stole over me. I could not go home, and yet I had no other choice but death. I had scarcely thought of death, when a longing seized me. Death grew so beautiful in my eyes! The false smile, the mysterious welcome, the sweep of deep waters, the vague allurement of a profound endless welcome, drew me on and on.

Two men chatting passed me by as one said to the other, "The tide's full in at Waterloo Bridge now; the moon must look quite lovely there." It was spoken in harmony with my thoughts. I had read in my happier days in the papers how poor girls had ended their misery by climbing over the balustrade of Waterloo Bridge, over the black abyss, dotted with the reflected lamps,

and stepping off it into the dark air into death. I was going now to that bridge—people would direct me—by the time I reached it the thoroughfare would be still and deserted enough. I can't say I had determined upon this—I can't say I ever thought about it—it was only that the scene and the event had taken possession of me, with the longing of a child for its home.

The streets were quieter now; but some shops were still open. Among these was a jeweller's. The shutters were up, and only the door open. I stepped in, I don't in the least know why. The fever, I suppose, had touched my brain. There were only three men in the shop—one behind the counter, a smiling, ceremonious man, whom I believe to have been the owner—the two others were customers. One was a young man, sitting on a chair with his elbow on the counter, examining and turning over some jewelry that glittered in a little heap on the counter. The other, older and dressed

in black, was leaning over the counter, with his back to me, and discussing, in low, careless tones, the merits of a dagger, which, from their talk, not distinctly heard, I conjectured the young man had been recommending as a specific against garotters. I was in no condition to comprehend or care for the debate. The elder man, as he talked, sometimes laid the little weapon down upon the counter, and sometimes took it up, fitting it in his hand.

The intense light of the gas striking on my eyes made them ache acutely. I don't know why, or how, I entered the shop; I only know that I found myself standing within the door in a blaze of gaslight.

The jeweller, looking at me sharply across the counter, said:

"Well, ma'am?"

I answered:

"Can you give me change for a sovereign?"

I must have been losing my head; for

though I spoke in perfect good faith, I had not a shilling about me. It was not forgetfulness, but distinctly an illusion; for I not only had the picture of the imaginary sovereign distinctly before me, but thought I had it actually in my hand.

The jeweller was talking in subdued and urbane accents to his customer, and pointing out, no doubt, the special beauties and workmanship of his *bijouterie.*

"Sorry I can't oblige you; you must try elsewhere," he said, again directing a hard glance at me. I think he was satisfied that I was not a thief; and he continued his talk with the young man who was making his selection, and who was probably a little hard to please. I turned to leave the shop, and the jeweller went into the next room, possibly in search of something more likely to please his fastidious client at the counter.

I had not yet seen the face of either of the visitors to the shop, but I was conscious that the younger of the two had once or

twice looked over his shoulder at me. He now said, taking his purse from his pocket —it was but as a parenthesis in his talk with his companion—

"I beg pardon; perhaps I can manage that change for you."

I drew nearer. What occurred next appeared to me like an incident in a dream, in which our motives are often so obscure that our own acts take us by surprise. Whether it was a mad moment or a lucid moment I don't know; for in extreme misery, if our courage does not fail us, our thoughts are always wicked.

I stood there, a slight figure, in crape, cloaked, veiled—in pain, giddy, confused. I cannot tell you what interest the commonplace spectacle before me had for me, nor why I stayed there, gazing towards the three gas lamps that seemed each girt with a dazzling halo that made my eyes ache. What sounds and sights smote my sick senses with a jarring recognition? The

hard, nasal tones of the elderly man in black, who leaned over the counter, and the pallid, scornful face, with its fine, restless eyes and sinister energy, were those of Monsieur Droqville!

He was talking to his companion, and did not trouble himself to look at me. He little dreamed what an image of death stood at his elbow!

They were not talking any longer about the pretty dagger that lay on the counter, by his open fingers. Monsieur Droqville was now indulging his cynical vein upon another theme. He was finishing a satirical summing up of poor papa's character. I saw the sneer, the shrug; I heard in his hard, bitter talk the name made sacred to me by unutterable calamity; I listened to the outrage from the lips of the man who had himself done it all. Oh, beloved, ruined father! Can I ever forget the pale smile of despair, the cold, piteous voice with which, on that frightful night, he said, "Droqville has done it

all—he has broken my heart." And here was the very Droqville, with the scoff, the contempt, the triumph in his pitiless face; and poor papa in his bloody shroud, and mamma dying! What cared I what became of me? An icy chill seemed to stream from my brain through me, to my feet, to my finger tips; as a shadow moves, I had leaned over, and the hand that holds this pen had struck the dagger into Droqville's breast.

In a moment his face darkened, with a horrified, vacant look. His mouth opened, as if to speak or call out, but no sound came; his deep-set eyes, fixed on me, were darkening; he was sinking backward, with a groping motion of his hand, as if to ward off another blow.

Was it real? For a second I stared, freezing with horror; and then, with a gasp, darted through the shop-door.

An accident, as I afterwards learned, had lamed Droqville's companion, and thus

favoured my escape. Before many seconds, however, pursuit was on my track. I soon heard its cry and clatter. The street was empty when I ran out. My echoing steps were the only sound there for some seconds. I fled with the speed of the wind. I turned to the left down a narrow street, and from that to the right into a kind of stable lane. I heard shouting and footsteps in pursuit. I ran for some time, but the shouting and sounds of pursuit continued. My strength failed me; I stopped short behind a sort of buttress, beside a coach-house gate; I was hardly a second there. An almost suicidal folly prompted me. I know not why, but I stepped out again from my place of concealment, intending to give myself up to my pursuers. I walked slowly back a few steps towards them. One was now close to me. A man without a hat, crying, "Stop, stop, police!" ran furiously past me. It clearly never entered his mind that I, walking slowly towards him, could possibly be the fugitive.

So this moment, as I expected of perdition, passed innocuously by.

By what instinct, chance, or miracle I made the rest of my way home, I know not. When I reached the door-stone, Rebecca Torkill was standing there watching for me in irrepressible panic.

When she was sure it was I, she ran out, crying, "Oh! God be thanked, miss, it's you, my child!" She caught me in her arms, and kissed me with honest vehemence. I did not return her caress—I was worn out; it all seemed like a frightful dream. Her voice sounded ever so far away. I saw her, as raving people see objects mixed with unrealities. I did not say a word as she conveyed me upstairs with her stalwart arm round my waist.

I heard her say, "Your mamma's better; she's quite easy now." I could not say, "Thank God!" I was conscious that I showed no trace of pleasure, nor even of comprehension, in my looks.

She was looking anxiously in my face as she talked to me, and led me into the drawing-room. I did not utter a word, nor look to the right or left. With a moan I sat down on the sofa. I was shivering uncontrollably.

Another phantom was now before me, talking with Rebecca. It was Mr. Carmel; his large, strange eyes—how dark and haggard they looked—fixed on my face with a gaze almost of agony! Something fell from my hand on the table as my fingers relaxed. I had forgotten that I held anything in them. I saw them both look at it, and then on one another with a glance of alarm, and even horror. It was the dagger, stained with blood, that had dropped upon that homely table.

I was unable to follow their talk. I saw him take it up quickly, and look from it to me, and to Rebecca again, with a horrible uncertainty. It was, indeed, a rather sinister waif to find in the hand of a person

evidently so ill as I was, especially with a mark of blood also upon that trembling hand. He looked at it again very carefully; then he put it into Rebecca's hand, and said something very earnestly.

They talked on for a time. I neither understood nor cared what they said; nor cared, indeed, at all what became of me.

"You're not hurt, darling?" she whispered, with her earnest old eyes very near mine.

"I? No. Oh, no!" I answered.

"Not with that knife?"

"No," I repeated.

I was rapidly growing worse.

A little time passed thus, and then I saw Mr. Carmel pray with his hands clasped for a few moments, and I heard him distinctly say to Rebecca, "She's very ill. I'll go for the doctor;" and he added some words to her. He looked ghastly pale: as he gazed in my face, his eyes seemed to burn into my brain. Then another figure was

added to the group; our maid glided in, and stood beside Rebecca Torkill, and, as it seemed to me, murmured vaguely. I could not understand what she or they said. She looked as frightened as the rest. I had perception enough left to feel that they all thought me dying. So the thought filled my darkened mind that I was indeed passing into the state of the dead. The black curtain that had been suspended over me for so long at last descended, and I remember no more for many days and nights.

The secret was, for the present, mine only. I lay, as the old writers say, "at God's mercy," the sword's point at my throat, in the privation, darkness, and utter helplessness of fever. Safe enough it was with me. My brain could recall nothing; my lips were sealed. But though I was speechless, another person was quickly in possession of the secret.

Some weeks, as I have said, are simply struck out of my existence. When gra-

dually the cold, grey light of returning life stole in upon me, I almost hoped it might be fallacious. I hated to come back to the frightful routine of existence. I was so very weak that even after the fever left me I might easily have died at any moment.

I was promoted at length to the easy-chair, in which, in dressing-gown and slippers, people recover from dangerous illnesses. There, in the listlessness of exhaustion, I used to sit for hours, without reading, without speaking, without even thinking. Gradually, by little and little, my spirit revived, and, as life returned, the black cares and fears essential to existence glided in, and gathered round with awful faces.

One day old Rebecca, who, no doubt, had long been anxious, asked,

"How did you come by that knife, Miss Ethel, that you fetched home in your hand the night you took ill?"

"A knife? Did I?" I spoke, quietly suppressing my horror. "What was it like?"

I was almost unconscious until then that I had really taken away the dagger in my hand. This speech of Rebecca's nearly killed me. They were the first words I had heard connecting me distinctly with that ghastly scene.

She described it, and repeated her question.

"Where is it?" I asked.

"Mr. Carmel took it away with him," she replied, "the same night."

"Mr. Carmel?" I repeated, remembering with a new terror his connexion with Monsieur Droqville. "You had no business to allow him to see it, much less—good Heaven!—to take it."

I stood up in my terror, but I was too weak, and stumbled back into the chair.

I would answer no question of hers. She saw that she was agitating me, and desisted.

The whole scene in the jeweller's shop remained emblazoned in vivid tints and

lights on my memory. But there was something more, and that perhaps the most terrible ingredient in it.

I had recognised another face besides Droqville's. It started between me and the wounded man as I recoiled from my own blow. One hand was extended towards me, to prevent my repeating the stroke—the other held up the wounded man.

Sometimes I doubted whether the whole of that frightful episode was not an illusion. Sometimes it seemed only that the pale face, so much younger and handsomer than Monsieur Droqville's—the fiery eyes, the frown, the scarred forehead, the suspended smile that had for only that dreadful moment started into light before me so close to my face, were those of a spectre.

The young man who had been turning over the jewels at the counter, and who had offered to give me change for my imaginary sovereign, was the very man I had seen shipwrecked at Malory; the man who had

in the wood near Plas Ylwd fought that secret duel; and who had afterwards made, with so reckless an audacity, those mad declarations of love to me; the man who, for a time, had so haunted my imagination, and respecting whom I had received warnings so dark and formidable.

Nothing could be more vivid than this picture, nothing more uncertain than its reality. I did not see recognition in the face; all was so instantaneous. Well, I cared not. I was dying. What was the world to me? I had assigned myself to death; and I was willing to accept that fate rather than re-ascend to my frightful life.

My poor mother, who knew nothing of my strange adventure, had experienced one of those deceitful rallies which sometimes seem to promise a long reprieve, in that form of heart-complaint under which she suffered. She only knew that I had had brain-fever. How near to death I had been she never knew. She was spared, too, the

horror of my dreadful adventure. I was now recovering rapidly and surely; but I was so utterly weak and heart-broken that I fancied I must die, and thought that they were either deceived themselves, or trying kindly, but in vain, to deceive me. I was at length convinced by finding myself able, as I have said, to sit up. Mamma was often with me, cheered by my recovery. I dare say she had been more alarmed than Rebecca supposed.

I learned from mamma that the money that had maintained us through my illness had come from Mr. Carmel. Little as it was, it must have cost him exertion to get it; for men in his position cannot, I believe, own money of their own. It was very kind. I said nothing, but I was grateful; his immovable fidelity touched me deeply. I wondered whether Mr. Carmel had often made inquiries during my illness, or had shown an interest in my recovery. But I dared not ask.

CHAPTER XX.

AN OMINOUS VISIT.

I HAVE sometimes felt that, even without a revelation, we might have discovered that the human race was born to immortality. Death is an intrusion here. Children can't believe in it. When they see it first, it strikes them with curiosity and wonder. It is a long time before they comprehend its real character, or believe that it is common to all; to the end of our days we are hardly quite sincere when we talk of our own deaths.

Seeing mamma better, I thought no more of her danger than if the angel of death had never been within our doors, and I had

never seen the passing shadow of that spectre in her room.

As my strength returned, I grew more and more gloomy and excited. I was haunted by never-slumbering, and very reasonable, fore-castings of danger. In the first place, I was quite in the dark as to whether Monsieur Droqville was dangerously or mortally hurt, and I had no way of learning anything of him. Rebecca, it is true, used to take in, for her special edification, a Sunday paper, in which all the horrors of the week were displayed, and she used to con it over regularly, day after day, till the next number made its appearance. If Monsieur Droqville's name, with which she was familiar, had occurred in this odious register, she had at least had a fair chance of seeing it, and if she had seen it, she would be pretty sure to have mentioned it. Secretly, however, I was in miserable fear. Mr. Carmel had not returned since my recovery had ceased to be doubtful, and he was in

possession of the weapon that had fallen from my hand.

In his retention of this damning piece of evidence, and his withdrawing himself so carefully from my presence, coupled with my knowledge of the principles that bound him to treat all private considerations, feelings, and friendships as non-existent, when they stood ever so little in the way of his all-pervading and supreme duty to his order —there was a sinister augury. I lived in secret terror; no wonder I was not recovering quickly.

One day, when we had sat a long time silent, I asked Rebecca how I was dressed the night I had gone to Lord Chellwood's. I was immensely relieved when she told me, among other things, that I had worn a thick black veil. This was all I wanted to be assured of; for I could not implicitly rely upon my recollection through the haze and mirage of fever. It was some comfort to think that neither Monsieur Droqville nor

Mr. Marston could have recognised my features.

In this state of suspense I continued for two or three weeks. At the end of that time a little adventure happened. I was sitting in an arm-chair, in our drawing-room, with pillows about me, one afternoon, and had fallen into a doze. Mamma was in the room, and, when I had last seen her, was reading her Bible, which she now did sometimes for hours together—sometimes with tears, always with the trembling interest of one who has lost everything else.

I had fallen asleep. I was waked by tones that terrified me. I thought that I was still dreaming, or that I had lost my reason. I heard the nasal and energetic tones of Monsieur Droqville, talking with his accustomed rapidity in the room—not to mamma, for, as I afterwards found, she had left the room while I was asleep, but to Rebecca.

Happily for me, a screen stood between

me and the door, and I suppose he did not know that I was in the room. At every movement of his foot on the floor, at every harsh emphasis in his talk, my heart bounded. I was afraid to move, almost to breathe, lest I should draw his attention to me.

My illness had quite unnerved me. I was afraid that, restless and inquisitive as I knew him to be, he would peep round the screen, and see and talk to me. I did not know the object of his visit; but in terror I surmised it, and I lay among my pillows, motionless, and with my eyes closed, while I heard him examine Rebecca, sharply, as to the date of my illness, and the nature of it.

"When was Miss Ware last out, before her illness?" he asked at length.

"I could not tell you that exactly, sir," answered Rebecca, evasively. "She left the house but seldom, just before she was took ill; for her mamma being very bad, she was but little out of doors then."

He made a pretence of learning the facts of my case simply as a physician, and he offered in that capacity to see me at the moment. He asked the question in an off-hand way. "I can see her, I dare say? I'm a doctor, you know. Where is Miss Ware?"

The moment of silence that intervened before her answer seemed to me to last five minutes. She answered, however, quite firmly,

"No, sir; I thank you. She's attended by a doctor, quite reg'lar, and she's asleep now."

Rebecca had heard me speak with horror of Monsieur Droqville, and did not forget my antipathy.

He hesitated. I heard his fingers drumming, as he mused, upon the other side of the screen.

"Well," he said, dwelling on the word meditatively, "it doesn't matter much. I don't mind; only it might have been as well.

However, you can tell Mrs. Ware a note to my old quarters will find me, and I shall be very happy."

And so saying, I heard him walk, at first slowly, from the room, and then run briskly down the stairs. Then the old hall-door shut smartly after him.

The fear that this man inspired, and not without reason, in my mind, was indescribable. I can't be mistaken in my recollection upon that point, for, as soon as he was gone, I fainted.

When I recovered, my fears returned. No one who has not experienced that solitary horror, knows what it is to keep an undivulged secret, full of danger, every hour inspiring some new terror, with no one to consult, and no courage but your own to draw upon. Even mamma's dejected spirits took fire at what she termed the audacity of Monsieur Droqville's visit. My anger, greater than hers, was silenced by fear. Mamma was roused; she ran volubly—

though interrupted by many sobs and gushes of tears—over the catalogue of her wrongs and miseries, all of which she laid to Monsieur Droqville's charge.

The storm blew over, however, in an hour or so. But later in the evening mamma was suffering under a return of her illness, brought on by her agitation. It was not violent; still there was suffering; and, to me, gloomier proof that her malady was established, and the grave in a nearer perspective. This turned my alarms into a new channel.

She was very patient and gentle. As I sat by her bedside, looking at her sad face, what unutterable tenderness, what sorrow trembled at my heart! At about six o'clock she had fallen asleep, and with this quietude my thoughts began to wander, and other fears returned. It was for no good, I was sure, that Monsieur Droqville had tracked us to our dismal abode. Whatever he might do in this affair of my crime, or mania,

passion would not guide it, nor merely social considerations; it would be directed by a policy the principles of which I could not anticipate. I had no clue to guide me; I was in utter darkness, and surrounded by all the fancies that imagination conjures from the abyss.

I was not destined to wait very long in uncertainty.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFIDENTIAL.

THE sun was setting, when, on tip-toe, scarcely letting my dress rustle, so afraid I was of disturbing mamma's sleep, I stole from her room, intending to give some directions to Rebecca Torkill. As I went down the dusky stairs I passed our Malory maid, who said something, pointing to the drawing-room. I saw her lips move, but, as will happen when one is pre-occupied, I took in nothing of what she said, but, with a mechanical acquiescence, followed the direction of her hand, and entered the sitting-room.

Our house stood upon high ground, and

the nearest houses between our front windows and the west were low, so that the last beams of sunset, red with smoke and mist, passed over their roofs, and shone dimly on the oak panels opposite. The windows were narrow, and the room rather dark. I saw some one standing at the window-frame in the shade. I was startled, and hesitated, close to the door. The figure turned quickly, the sun glancing on his features. It was Mr. Carmel. He came towards me quickly; and he said, as I fancied, very coldly,

"Can you spare me two or three minutes alone, Miss Ware? I have but little to say," he added, as I did not answer. "But it is important, and I will make my words as few as possible."

We were standing close to the door. I assented. He closed it gently, and we walked slowly, side by side, to the window where he had been standing. He turned. The faint sun, like a distant fire, lighted his

face. What singular dark eyes he had, so large, so enthusiastic! and had ever human eye such a character of suffering? I knew very well what he was going to speak of. The face, sad, sombre, ascetic, with which I was so familiar, I now, for the first time, understood.

The shadow of the confessional was on it. It was the face of one before whom human nature, in moments of terrible sincerity, had laid bare its direful secrets, and submitted itself to a melancholy anatomisation. To some minds, sympathetic, proud, sensitive, the office of the confession must be full of self-abasement, pain, and horror. We who know our own secrets, and no one else's, know nothing of the astonishment, and melancholy, and disgust that must strike some minds on contemplating the revelations of others, and discovering, for certain, that the standard of human nature is not above such and such a level.

"I have brought you this," he said, scarcely above his breath, holding the knife so that it lay across the hollow of his hand. His haggard eyes were fixed on me, and he said, "I know the whole story of it. Unless you forbid me, I will drop it into the river to-night; it is the evidence of an act for which you are, I thank God, no more accountable than a somnambulist for what she does in her dream. Over Monsieur Droqville I have neither authority nor influence; on the contrary, he can command me. But of this much I am sure—so long as your friends do not attack Lady Lorrimer's will—and I believe they have no idea of taking any such step—you need fear no trouble whatever from him."

I made him no reply, but I think he saw something in my face that made him add, with more emphasis,

"You may be sure of that."

I was immensely and instantly relieved,

for I knew that there was not the slightest intention of hazarding any litigation on the subject of the will.

"But," he resumed, in the same cold tones, and with the same anxiety in his dark eyes, "there is a person from whom you may possibly experience annoyance. There are circumstances of which, as yet, you know nothing, that may, not unnaturally, bring you once more into contact with Mr. Marston. If that should happen, you must be on your guard. I understand that he said something that implies his suspicions. It may have been no more than conjecture. It may be that it was impossible he could have recognised you with certainty. If, I repeat, an untoward destiny should bring you together under the same roof, be wise, stand aloof from him, admit nothing; defeat his suspicions and his cunning by impenetrable caution. He has an interest in seeking to disgrace you, and where he has an object to gain he has neither conscience nor mercy. I

wish I could inspire you with the horror of that mean and formidable character which so many have acquired by a bitter experience. I can but repeat my warning, and implore of you to act upon it, if the time should come. This thing I retain for the present"—he glanced at the weapon in his hand—"and dispose of it to-night, as I said."

There was no emotion in his manner; no sign of any special interest in me; but his voice and looks were unspeakably earnest, and inspired me with a certain awe.

I had not forgiven Mr. Carmel yet, or rather my pride would not retract; and my parting with him at our former house was fresh in my recollection. So it was, I might suppose, in his; for his manner was cold, and even severe.

"Our old acquaintance ended, Miss Ware, by your command, and, on reflection, with my own willing submission. When last we parted, I thought it unlikely that we should ever meet again, and this interview is not

voluntary—necessity compelled it. I have simply done my duty, and, I earnestly hope, not in vain. It must be something very unlooked for, indeed, that shall ever constrain me to trouble you again."

He showed no sign of wishing to bid me a kindlier farewell. The actual, as well as metaphorical, distance between us had widened; he was by this time at the door; he opened it, and took his leave, very coldly. It was very unlike his former parting. I had only said:

"I am very grateful, Mr. Carmel, for your care of me—miserable me!"

He made no answer; he simply repeated his farewell, as gently and coldly as before, and left the room, and I saw him walk away from our door in the fast-fading light. Heavier and heavier was my heart, as I saw him move quickly away. I had yearned, during our cold interview, to put out my hand to him, and ask him, in simple phrase, to make it up with me. I burned to tell

him that I had judged him too hardly, and was sorry; but my pride forbade it. His pride, too, I thought, had held him aloof, and so I had lost my friend. My eyes filled with tears, that rolled heavily over my cheeks.

I sat at one of our windows, looking, over the distant roofs, towards the discoloured and disappearing tints of evening and the melancholy sky, which even through the smoke of London has its poetry and tenderness, until the light faded, and the moon began to shine through the twilight. Then I went upstairs, and found mamma still sleeping. As I stood by the bed looking at her, Rebecca Torkill at my side whispered—

"She's looking very pale, poor thing, don't you think, miss? Too pale, a deal."

I did think so; but she was sleeping tranquilly. Every change in her looks was now a subject of anxiety, but her hour had not quite come yet. She looked so very pale that I began to fear that she had fainted;

but she awoke just then, and said she would sit up for a little time. Her colour did not return ; she seemed faint, but thought she should be more herself by-and-by.

She came down to the drawing.room, and soon did seem better, and chatted more than she had done, I think, since our awful misfortune had befallen us, and appeared more like her former self ; I mean, that simpler and tender self that I had seen far away from artificial London, among the beautiful solitudes of her birthplace.

While we were talking here, Rebecca Torkill, coming in now and then, and lending a word, after the manner of privileged old rustic servants, to keep the conversation going, the business of this story was being transacted in other places.

Something of Mr. Carmel's adventures that night I afterwards learned. He had two or three calls to make before he went to his temporary home. A friend had lent

him, during his absence abroad, his rooms in the Temple. Arrived there, he let himself in by a latch-key. It was night, the shutters unclosed, the moon shining outside, and its misty beams, slanting in at the dusty windows, touched objects here and there in the dark room with a cold distinctness.

To a man already dejected, what is more dispiriting than a return to empty and unlighted rooms? Mr. Carmel moved like a shadow through this solitude, and in his melancholy listlessness, stood for a time at the window.

Here and there a light, from a window in the black line of buildings opposite, showed that human thought and eyes were busy; but if these points of light and life made the prospect less dismal, they added by contrast to the gloom that pervaded his own chambers.

As he stood, some dimly-seen movement caught his eye, and, looking over his shoulder, he saw the door through which he

had himself come in slowly open, and a man put in his head, and then enter silently, and shut the door. This figure, faintly seen in the imperfect light, resembled but one man of all his acquaintance, and he the last man in the world, as he thought, who would have courted a meeting. Carmel stood for a moment startled and chilled by his presence.

"I say, Carmel, don't you know me?" said a very peculiar voice. "I saw you come in, and intended to knock; but you left your door open."

By this time he had reached the window, and stood beside Mr. Carmel, with the moonlight revealing his features sharply enough. That pale light fell upon the remarkable face of Mr. Marston.

"I'm not a ghost, though I've been pretty near it two or three times. I see what you're thinking—death may have taken better men? I might have been very well spared? and having escaped it, I should have laid the lesson to heart? Well, so I

have. I was very nearly killed at the great battle of Fuentas. I fought for the Queen of Spain, and be hanged to her! She owes me fifteen pounds ten and elevenpence, British currency, to this day. It only shows my luck. In that general action there were only four living beings hit so as to draw blood—myself, a venerable orange-woman, a priest's mule, and our surgeon-in-chief, whose thumb and razor were broken by a spent ball, as he was shaving a grenadier, under an umbrella, while the battle was raging. You see the Spaniard is a discreet warrior, and we very seldom got near enough to hurt each other. I was hit by some blundering beast. He must have shut his eyes, like Gil Blas, for there was not a man in either army who could ever hit anything he aimed at. No matter, he very nearly killed me; half an inch higher, and I must have made up my mind to see you, dear Carmel, no more, and to shut my eyes on this sweet, jesuitical world. It was the first

ugly wound of the campaign, and the enemy lived for a long time on the reputation of it. But the truth is, I have suffered a great deal in sickness, wounds, and fifty other ways. I have been as miserable a devil as any righteous man could wish me to be; and I am changed; upon my honour, I'm as different a man from what I was as you are from me. But I can't half see you; do light your candles, I entreat."

"Not while you are here," said Carmel.

"Why, what are you afraid of?" said Marston. "You haven't, I hope, got a little French milliner behind your screen, like Joseph Surface, who, I think, would have made a very pretty Jesuit. Why should you object to light?"

"Your ribaldry is out of place here," said Carmel, who knew very well that Marston had not come to talk nonsense, and recount his adventures in Spain; and that his business, whatever it might be, was likely to be odious. "What right have you to enter my

room? What right to speak to me anywhere?"

"Come, Carmel, don't be unreasonable; you know very well I can be of use to you."

"You can be of none," answered Carmel, a little startled; "and if you could, I would not have you. Leave my room, sir."

"You can exorcise some evil spirits, but not me, till I've said my say," answered Marston, with a smile that looked grim and cynical in the moonlight. "I say I can be of use to you."

"It's enough; I won't have it; go," said Carmel, with a sterner emphasis.

Marston smiled again, and looked at him.

"Well, I can be of use," he said, "and I don't want particularly to be of use to you; but you can do me a kindness, and it is better to do it quietly than upon compulsion. Will you be of use to me? I'll show you how?"

"God forbid!" said Carmel, quickly. "It is nothing good, I'm sure."

Marston looked at him with an evil eye; it was a sneer of intense anger.

After some seconds he said, his eyes still fixed askance on Mr. Carmel:

"Forgive us our traspasses, as we forgive, et cætera—eh? I suppose you sometimes pray your paternoster? A pretty time you have kept up that old grudge against me—haven't you—about Ginevra?"

He kept his eyes on Carmel, as if he enjoyed the spectacle of the torture he applied, and liked to see the wince and quiver that accompanied its first thrill.

At the word, Edwyn Carmel's eyes started up from the floor, to which they had been lowered, with a flash to the face of his visitor. His forehead flushed; he remained speechless for some seconds. Marston did not smile; his features were fixed, but there was a secret, cruel smile in his eyes as he watched these evidences of agitation.

"Well, I should not have said the name; I should not have alluded to it; I did

wrong," he said, after some seconds; "but I was going, before you riled me, to say how really I blame myself, now, for all that deplorable business. I do, upon my soul! What more can a fellow say, when reparation is impossible, than that he is sorry? Is not repentance all that a man like me can offer? I saw you were thinking of it; you vexed me; I was angry, and I could not help saying what I did. Now do let that miserable subject drop; and hear me, on quite another, without excitement. It is not asking a great deal."

Carmel placed his hand to his head, as if he had not heard what he said, and then groaned.

"Why don't you leave me?" he said, piteously, turning again towards Marston; "don't you see that nothing but pain and reproach can result from your staying here?"

"Let me first say a word," said Marston; "you can assist me in a very harmless and

perfectly unobjectionable matter. Every fellow who wants to turn over a new leaf marries. The lady is poor—there is that proof, at least, that it is not sordid; you know her, you can influence her——"

"Perhaps I do know her; perhaps I know who she is—I may as well say, at once, I do. I have no influence; and if I had, I would not use it for you. I think I know your reasons, also; I think I can see them."

"Well, suppose there are reasons, it's not the worse for that," said Marston, growing again angry. "I thought I would just come and try whether you chose to be on friendly terms. I'm willing; but if you won't, I can't help you. I'll make use of you all the same. You had better think again. I'm pleasanter as a friend than an enemy."

"I don't fear you as an enemy, and I do fear you as a friend. I will aid you in nothing; I have long made up my mind," answered Carmel, savagely.

"I think, through Monsieur Droqville, I'll manage that. Oh, yes, you will give me a lift."

"Why should Monsieur Droqville control my conduct?" asked Mr. Carmel sharply.

"It was he who made you a Catholic; and I suspect he has a fast hold on your conscience and obedience. If he chooses to promote the matter, I rather think you must."

"You may think as you please," said Carmel.

"That's a great deal from your Church," sneered Marston; and, changing his tone again, he said: "Look here, Carmel, once more; where's the good in our quarrelling? I won't press that other point, if you don't like; but you must do this, the most trifling thing in the world—you must tell me where Mrs. Ware lives. No one knows since old Ware made a fool of himself, poor devil! But I think you'll allow that, with my feel-

ings, I may, at least, speak to the young lady's mother? Do tell me where they are. You know, of course?"

"If I did know, I should not tell you; so it does not matter," answered Carmel.

Marston looked very angry, and a little silence followed.

"I suppose you have now said everything," resumed Carmel; "and again I desire that you will leave me."

"I mean to do so," said Marston, putting on his hat with a kind of emphasis, "though it's hard to leave such romantic, light, and brilliant company. You might have had peace, and you prefer war. I think there are things you have at heart that I could forward, if all went right with me." He paused, but Carmel made no sign. "Well, you take your own way now, not mine; and, by-and-by, I think you'll have reason to regret it."

Marston left the room, with no other farewell. The clap with which he shut the door, as he went, had hardly ceased to ring round the walls, when Carmel saw him emerge in the court below, and walk away with a careless air, humming a tune in the moonlight.

Why is it that there are men upon earth whose secret thoughts are always such as to justify fear; and nearly all whose plans, if not through malice, from some other secret obliquity, involve evil to others? We have most of us known something of some such man; a man whom we are disposed to watch in silence; who, smile as he may, brings with him a sense of insecurity, and whose departure is a real relief. Such a man seems to me a stranger on earth; his confidences to be with unseen companions; his mental enjoyments not human; and his mission here cruel and mysterious. I look back with wonder and with thankfulness.

Fearful is the strait of anyone who, in the presence of such an influence, under such a fascination, loses the sense of danger.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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